

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Tuesday 11 November 2008

The Speaker (The Hon. George Richard Torbay) took the chair at 12.00 p.m.

The Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

MINI-BUDGET SPEECH

[The Hon. Eric Roozendaal was conducted by the Deputy Serjeant-at-Arms onto the floor of the Chamber.]

The SPEAKER: Order! I advise members that the House has requested the attendance of the Hon. Eric Roozendaal, MLC. In accordance with our practice on these occasions, the usual courtesies are to be accorded to the Treasurer, in particular, that his Speech should be heard without interruption.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL (Treasurer) [12.01 p.m.]: Today I put forward the Government's plans to keep our financial position strong in the most uncertain times since the Depression of the 1930s.

I will outline the decisions we have made in defence of our State's triple-A credit rating and the protection of front-line services.

I will explain what the resolution of the 10-year electricity debate means for the people of New South Wales.

We are witnessing international events as alarming as they are unprecedented.

The American sub-prime crisis has infected much of the international banking and credit system.

A lack of trust and confidence has stalled traditional lending and investment.

Many financial institutions, including some of the oldest in the world, have required extreme government support, from multi-billion dollar "bail outs" to effective "nationalisation"—a policy long thought forgotten in these times.

Stock market movements have been more volatile than any time in living memory.

We are yet to feel the full impact on the "real" economy on wages, on building, construction, investment and economic growth and, the most important of indicators, employment.

The Prime Minister has warned all Australians of the tough times ahead.

And now the Commonwealth Treasurer advises there is a \$40 billion drop in his Federal budget. And so the financial crisis affects us all.

With Canberra revising down GST revenue, New South Wales can expect to receive \$450 million less in general purpose grants this year and \$272 million less next financial year.

That is \$722 million less GST revenue in our budget.

The June 2008 budget assumed a decline in transfer duties of around \$300 million, or 7.3 per cent, from the previous financial year.

But, given the prevailing climate this is revised down by a further \$710 million—a 25 per cent decline.

In dollar terms this represents a \$1 billion drop in transfer duty revenues from last year's projections.

We have also seen continued growth of the Health budget reflecting the ageing population and rising health costs.

These are the reasons why the \$268 million surplus previously forecast has been revised to an expected deficit of \$917 million this financial year.

This is not the desired outcome but we can withstand a deficit for one year in the present climate.

The decisions I announce are designed to return the budget to surplus in the years that follow. Today I announce:

- savings totalling \$3.3 billion over the next four years; and
- and measures to raise \$3.6 billion.
- I confirm the business tax cuts of \$1.9 billion remain; and
- I announce targeted expenditure of \$850 million.

With these measures we expect the budget to return to a surplus of \$138 million next year, rising to a surplus of \$573 million in 2010-11 and \$900 million in 2011-12.

And with these decisions, New South Wales remains strong.

We remain strong and with prudent financial management our future remains bright.

Our economy is the largest in the nation, larger even than Singapore or Hong Kong, with a gross State product of \$374 billion.

We are the financial capital of South-East Asia and the Southern Hemisphere.

Our economy is not resource-intensive but rather a services economy.

This means we are the first to feel the effects of the international crisis, but we can also be the first to recover.

Our response to the international crisis must be decisive, measured and anchored in economic responsibility.

That is why under the instruction of the Premier we have placed our State's finances under prudent and rigorous analysis.

It leads to this conclusion:

With the strength to make difficult decisions and the resolve to follow through our budget and financial future are protected.

I assure the people of New South Wales we will meet this challenge.

The Premier has emptied the too-hard basket and the difficult decisions are being made.

We have crafted a tough, decisive and detailed mini-budget demanded by the times in which we live.

To this end, we have targeted bureaucracy to remove it.

We have hunted for waste to shred it.

And we have reassessed projects that threaten our credit rating. But, we have also quarantined front-line services.

We have reaffirmed \$56.8 billion worth of infrastructure projects over the next four years.

We have invested in a public transport partnership to get more cars off our roads and to improve public transport.

And we will give young families an even better chance to realise the dream of home ownership.

And, as already confirmed, we have secured reductions in payroll tax, injecting \$1.9 billion into our economy over the next four years to help New South Wales businesses weather the storm.

Our discipline allows us to keep this commitment to the business sector.

Under the Premier's leadership we have four key goals:

First, that we do all in our power to preserve the New South Wales triple-A credit rating.

Preserving the triple-A credit rating is of genuine and immediate importance.

There has been much debate in the public arena on this point. Some have suggested this goal should be abandoned and high levels of debt accumulated.

This suggestion is wrong and simply misguided.

A triple-A credit rating says to the rest of the world we have the safest and strongest of balance sheets.

That New South Wales is a sound investment.

That is why our State's best defence against the international tide of uncertainty is a triple-A credit rating.

At a time when securing credit is becoming a challenge a credit rating downgrade would also increase the cost of borrowings.

If we do not act now to protect the triple-A rating the cost of government borrowing could rise by 20 to 25 basis points. That is \$100 million in extra interest per annum by the end of 2012.

\$100 million is the equivalent of 200 buses, 1,000 additional classroom teachers, or 30 new air-conditioned train carriages.

The mini-budget will steer a prudent and responsible course towards preserving our triple-A credit rating.

Our second goal is to secure the State's future power needs. I can report to the House our plan, brokered by the Premier, includes:

- the continued public ownership of generators;
- the continued public ownership of transmission and distribution networks—that is, the poles and wires;
- the sale of generation development sites;
- the sale of the retail businesses;
- a transfer of energy trading functions to the private sector.

Our actions will encourage private sector investment in generation and reduce the need for future capital expenditure by government.

Finally, we have ensured price protection for our community and job protection for our workers.

Our third goal has been to quarantine front-line workers.

I offer this assurance:

Our target has been bureaucratic waste and inefficiency.

We have chosen bus drivers over bureaucrats, teachers over technocrats, and front-line jobs over junkets.

The Premier has made it clear: apart from the front-line, all levels of government, including the Cabinet, must shoulder their fair share.

Our fourth goal has been to maintain job-creating infrastructure investment, and to do so in a financially responsible way.

The lesson of economic history is that investment is the shield against unemployment and that governments must lead the way.

That is why this year we are investing \$13.8 billion in job-creating infrastructure.

Next year we will invest \$14.7 billion in infrastructure.

In 2010 we will invest \$14.4 billion, and in 2011 we will invest a further \$13.7 billion.

This is the largest infrastructure program of any government in Australia over the next four years.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order, including the member for Myall Lakes and the member for Cessnock.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: The projects we are building include:

- the \$757 million Port Botany Expansion;
- the \$156 million Victoria Road upgrade, including the duplication of Iron Cove Bridge;
- \$246 million for 19 new school projects and 12 new TAFE projects;
- the \$96 million Port Kembla Inner Harbour Development; and
- the \$1.9 billion Sydney desalination plant, to be completed by the end of next year.

We have also submitted our funding bids to Infrastructure Australia for other projects.

Financial responsibility means some projects have been reassessed.

There has been much debate about the North West Metro.

But the fact is to proceed with it now would be economically irresponsible.

The State must build only what it can afford to build, and it is the right decision to defer this project.

I now turn to the features of the mini-budget.

Mini-budget Features

As I have outlined, we have:

- identified savings totalling \$3.3 billion over the next four years; and
- measures to raise \$3.6 billion.

I also announce additional expenditure of \$850 million.

An extra \$3,000 will be available for first home buyers who build a new home or buy a newly constructed home over the next 12 months.

This grant is effective from today and means grants of up to \$24,000 are available for first home buyers.

Further, we will preserve stamp duty exemptions for first home buyers under \$500,000.

This means a first home buyer of a new property valued at \$475,000 will save over \$40,000.

To further stimulate housing construction I have asked Treasury to urgently review the infrastructure levies that apply to the development of greenfield housing sites, infill development and employment lands.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind Opposition members that they may have an opportunity to contribute to this debate at a later time.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: This will include a review of section 94 levies.

These levies need to be consistent with our plans to boost housing supply and affordability.

We will consult with local government and industry stakeholders, and announce changes to this policy in the first half of next year.

I spoke of the need to quarantine the front-line, none more important than Health.

I can advise the Parliament that the New South Wales Health budget of \$13.2 billion has been maintained in the mini-budget.

And capital works investment of \$2.7 billion over the next four years has been preserved.

This includes:

- the \$950 million redevelopment of Royal North Shore Hospital;
- the \$390 million expansion of Liverpool Hospital;
- the \$212 million Newcastle Mater redevelopment;
- the \$145 million redevelopment of Auburn Hospital;
- the \$250 million redevelopment of Orange Hospital, including radiotherapy services; and
- the \$27 million Lismore Cancer Centre.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Wakehurst will cease interjecting. I call the member for Wakehurst to order. I call the member for Wakehurst to order for the second time. I call the member for Wakehurst to order for the third time.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: The Education portfolio's capital works program also benefits from the prudent decisions we have made. We will provide our schools with a \$150 million boost to school maintenance and minor capital works programs.

We will invest a further \$209 million into the Department of Community Services. The mini-budget has also focused on improving public transport.

In a change from the past the Roads and Traffic Authority and transport agencies are working together to achieve this common goal:

Better public transport and fewer cars on our roads.

And we need a different approach to managing finite road space while at the same time improving public transport capacity.

The Sydney Metro system is the spine of a new public transport network for Sydney.

At its northern end it will connect with a bus-metro interchange at Rozelle, taking pressure off the Anzac Bridge and George Street.

At its southern end it will interchange at Central Station, connecting with a re-engineered western line and providing extra train paths and more frequent services to the city's west.

The Sydney Metro system will be critical in servicing the new growth precinct at Barangaroo.

I can also announce we have budgeted \$370 million to provide new outer-suburban rail carriages.

These are in addition to the 121 carriages already purchased. We will also be making immediate improvements to our bus network.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting, including the member for Terrigal and the member for Upper Hunter.

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: We have allocated \$170 million to buy an extra 300 new buses and brought forward the purchase of 150 new bendy buses worth \$115 million.

The people of the north-west will receive the first allocation of 100 new buses.

These new buses will be directly funded by new tolling arrangements on the Sydney Harbour crossings.

The Sydney Harbour Bridge and the Sydney Harbour Tunnel will become the first motorways in Australia to switch to time-of-day tolling.

This means motorists who come into the city outside the peaks will pay less than peak users.

After full electronic tolling comes into effect on the Harbour Bridge in January 2009 we will introduce time-of-day tolling.

The toll on these roads will be a "peak" toll of \$4, a "shoulder" peak toll of \$3 and an off-peak toll of \$2.50.

This is the first change to the harbour crossing tolls in six years.

Every cent of the extra revenue raised will go to buying new buses.

This is a new policy to meet the challenge of congestion in Australia's only global city.

Parking space levies will be increased to discourage congestion.

This will generate \$58 million to fund more new buses and new commuter car parks in greater Sydney, on the Central Coast, in the Blue Mountains and in the Illawarra.

This mini-budget delivers more buses, more trains and more commuter car parks.

But it does so in an economically responsible way.

To improve efficiencies we will benchmark the performance of RailCorp maintenance and Sydney Ferries.

If there are not substantial improvements these functions will be outsourced.

Change must start at the top.

The Government must tighten its belt, both politicians and public servants.

That is why the Government will reduce the size of the senior executive service by 20 per cent, saving \$120 million over four years.

Today I also announce a staff freeze on all non-frontline public servants until the end of June next year. That is a staff freeze for all non-frontline positions, unless there are exceptional circumstances.

We are cutting the bureaucracy.

And a staff freeze ensures it shall not grow by stealth. I also confirm the Government's wages policy to require public sector wage increases over 2.5 per cent be met through productivity improvements that deliver cost savings.

This will produce a smaller, leaner but more efficient public sector.

I can also confirm a 25 per cent cut to government advertising, saving \$31 million a year.

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

The Hon. ERIC ROOZENDAAL: I also announce the abolition of overseas ministerial State tours and the enforcement of an air travel policy requiring the cheapest available fares be taken by members of Parliament and public servants.

Members of Parliament will no longer be entitled to free public transport passes.

Our community pays for public transport and so should we.

We are all in this together—it is only the front line that is immune.

I also flag today that the Government shall soon announce substantial changes to certain public sector agencies and departments.

At a minimum there will be mergers of back-office functions of some area health services, a restructure of the Department of Juvenile Justice and a rationalisation of some agencies.

I move on to asset and business sales and leases.

Under consideration for possible sale or lease includes New South Wales Lotteries, WSN Environmental Solutions, the Superannuation Administration Corporation, the Roads and Traffic Authority's personalised number plate business and there will be others.

These assets have the potential to unlock billions in capital for reinvestment in front-line services.

We are also reviewing the Government's property portfolio, including government office buildings, surplus agency land and commercial real estate in precincts such as Australian Technology Park and Darling Harbour. Given there are constraints on capital, we have made a decision to put the money where it is needed—in front-line services, not running commercial car parks and souvenir shops.

Given the current economic climate, the Government will be patient where necessary and wait for the right circumstances to prevail to ensure the best value.

We have also identified efficiency savings in many agencies across government, including the departments of Planning, Housing, Commerce, the Roads and Traffic Authority and others. The details are in the mini-budget papers.

The size of the fiscal challenge means savings alone are not enough; increased revenues are also required.

That is why a 2 per cent land tax on the unimproved value of land over \$2.25 million will be introduced. This will not affect principal place of residence, or rural land.

I repeat: This does not include the principal place of residence or rural land.

This measure will impact on the top 6 per cent of investors who pay land tax, and is expected to raise \$680 million over the next four years.

The Government will also extend environmental levies for non-recycled waste and increase coal royalties, raising an additional \$1.3 billion over the next four years.

However, in recognition of the importance of the mining industry as an employer in our regional areas, the Government will maintain a tier structure for mineral royalties and will not introduce a super royalty on coal as has been done in other States.

We will abolish the petrol subsidy in northern New South Wales and this will be timed to coincide with the Queensland Government's intention to restrict its subsidy scheme only to Queensland residents.

Previous budgets have brought forward dates for the abolition of Intergovernmental Agreement taxes. With the current fiscal position the abolition of these taxes will be deferred, increasing revenue by \$932 million in the forward estimates.

The Government will further reform the green slip scheme to provide hospital and ambulance coverage for at-fault drivers.

This extra coverage will add around \$10 to the cost of the average green slip.

But it is expected to produce savings in the public health system of \$100 million over the next four years. I can confirm the Government has discontinued the back-to-school allowance.

Savings will be put towards 80 new special needs teachers who will work one on one with the most needy school students in our State.

These teachers will work across 265 schools and help kids with autism, dyslexia and mental health problems.

The Government will reform the \$470 million school student travel scheme.

We will introduce an annual co-payment of \$45 for primary school students and \$90 for high school students. There will be a cost cap of \$180 per family with hardship provisions included.

I acknowledge these measures will be painful for some.

But these are reforms that have been left in the too-hard basket for too long and we can no longer afford to ignore them.

The Budget

The mini-budget projects growth in expenses over the forward estimates period to be around 5 per cent per annum. This is equal to the long-term average growth in revenues.

General government net debt will increase from \$4.9 billion in June 2008 to \$8.1 billion in June 2012.

Total State net debt will increase to 9.3 per cent of gross State product by June 2012 from 7.4 per cent in June 2009.

Like most super schemes, government super investments have been affected by recent market turbulence.

This has resulted in an increase in unfunded super liabilities, however, the Government remains on target to fully meet super liabilities by 2030 as outlined in the Fiscal Responsibility Act.

The current volatility makes economic forecasting difficult.

But what we can be certain about is the measures outlined in this mini-budget are real and they will improve the State's bottom line.

Keeping our triple-A credit rating is dependent on our ability to deliver the changes I have outlined today.

There is another major influence affecting our financial position that needs to be addressed for the long-term good of New South Wales.

Consider these facts:

Canberra collects more than 80 per cent of total tax revenue in Australia.

By contrast, New South Wales taxes represent less than 40 per cent of our total revenue, with Commonwealth grants making up 42 per cent of the total.

This year, at a time when we are running a deficit, New South Wales will subsidise South Australia, Tasmania and the Territories by \$2 billion.

In other words, every man, woman and child in New South Wales will hand over around \$290 to fund other States.

New South Wales raises around \$15 billion in GST revenue, but it gets back only around \$13 billion.

The ongoing cost shift in Health from Canberra to State governments is the other major issue that must be addressed.

In 1971 health expenditure represented 14.6 per cent of the total New South Wales budget, but by last year this had increased to around 28 per cent.

This reflects increased demand driven by an ageing population, advancing technology and rising health costs.

This is aggravated by the fact that the original health funding agreement between the States and Canberra established a 50:50 split for government funding of public hospitals.

Right now, Canberra's contribution to New South Wales public hospitals is around 40 per cent. New South Wales is forced to make up the difference.

This is a double blow.

We subsidise other States and Territories.

And we endure a cost shift from Canberra in the largest component of our budget—the Health portfolio.

This is the stark reality:

- a fiscal imbalance in the federation in which New South Wales is the worst affected State; and
- an urgent need for COAG to restructure the State-Commonwealth funding model, inherited by the Rudd Government.

On this point, I agree with this dire warning from the independent New South Wales Auditor-General, and I quote:

At this rate, funding for health will consume the entire State budget by 2033.

That is one generation away.

It does not get more serious than this.

We need new health-care models and we need a new funding agreement. We are determined to resolve this imbalance in cooperation with the Commonwealth.

Conclusion

Before commending this mini-budget for consideration by the House I offer these concluding remarks.

We have made difficult decisions and tough choices.

But in the times in which we live, difficult decisions need to be made.

The most irresponsible thing we could do is to do nothing.

With the decisions announced today we are confident in the state of our finances and in the strength of our economy.

This mini-budget is tough, it is decisive and it represents a change from the past.

It is the mini-budget the times have demanded.

And that is why I commend the mini-budget to the Parliament.

MINI-BUDGET FINANCIAL STATEMENTS

Copies of the Mini-Budget 2008-09 tabled and ordered to be printed.

[The Speaker left the chair at 12.34 p.m. The House resumed at 1.00 p.m.]

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

Question—That private members' statements be noted—proposed.

CHILDCARE CENTRES

LIVERPOOL YOUTH NEEDS COMMITTEE

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.05 p.m.]: On 30 September 2008 the Commissioner for Children and Young People, Gillian Calvert, visited my electorate of Macquarie Fields. We started at the Prestons Children's Centre, which is one of seven council-run centres. Childcare centres are important in bringing the community together and clearly have benefits that outweigh the costs. Council childcare centres also set the standards that others need to follow. At this time of difficulty with local government finances it is wonderful that the Liverpool City Council continues to be involved in childcare centres.

The collapse of ABC Learning Centres Ltd shows what happens when private enterprise takes over the very important business of child care. Inside the centre I met Jenny Green, the director, Jason Goldsmith, Karima Payenda and Helen Kourounis, the integration support teacher. There is an increasing rate of diagnosis of autism and for this reason childcare support workers such as Helen Kourounis are extremely valuable. Unfortunately, the delay in diagnosis may mean that many children with autism enter preschool later than is ideal.

In the afternoon Dean Williamson organised for us to meet with about 50 young people from the Liverpool Youth Needs Committee [LYNC]. Local youth said they felt that they were taken for granted and judged because they are from western Sydney. They want a chance to contribute, but they described the levels of funding for training, youth workers, housing and youth centres as inadequate. Noeleen Newton has worked at LYNC for 26 years and notes that the opportunities for some young people remain as restricted now as they were 26 years ago. Many of these young people have experienced family breakdown and for this reason have little parental involvement that could help break the chain of exclusion from society. Accommodation remains a major issue, with very little rental accommodation available. The youth often feel unfairly targeted by police but really enjoy Oztag, which LYNC runs with the police.

Dental health is a major issue. Few get to see a dentist and then only when they are in pain. They tend to use emergency departments as primary medical care. The 120 hours of supervised driving to obtain a licence remains unobtainable for many. This is a problem when getting employment means having to leave western Sydney. They find it difficult to access Centrelink benefits as the system is intimidating and the forms are often difficult to fill in. This makes it hard for them to access their entitlements. They may even have difficulty in

producing identification, as many of their certificates have disappeared with time. In addition, Centrelink workers are about to stop coming to LYNC, making it even harder for young people to sort out their income needs.

Noeleen Newton pointed out that it all comes down to money. Additional funding of \$10,000 a year could pay for many meals. The Rotary and Quota clubs locally have been an enormous help. Noeleen says that rather than new funding options, perhaps better funding of the old centres would be a more effective way of distributing the money. After meeting the youth from LYNC, we met local senior administrators at my electorate office. We discussed the recent finding of the Productivity Commissioner, who found that exclusive parental care for the first six months of life was desirable, yet only 18 weeks has currently been funded, meaning eight weeks of gap cover has to be found. This is a big problem with poor families, who may have used all their leave prior to the delivery of their baby.

If all the funding entitlement is exhausted there is little capacity to add further leave between 6 months and 12 months of age if the child or the mother becomes sick. Sixty six per cent of workers in Campbelltown and 60 per cent in Liverpool leave the local government area to work, which means that long day care remains a significant issue. Earlier care and the longer duration of care both have increased likelihood of detriment to children, yet many mothers of children need to return to work when the child is less than three months old, and this is more of an issue for western Sydney. As Ms Calvert stated, one cannot design a system based only on working families; it needs to be based on the needs of children.

In the past we have talked about the need for a one stop shop. This would provide a soft entry point for young people who require help with Centrelink benefits, health care, job opportunity and housing. Soft entry to services makes a difference and youth centres are vital to allow for this. It is time to revisit this issue.

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.10 p.m.]: I congratulate the member for Macquarie Fields on his speech about childcare centres, particularly his support for council-operated childcare centres: they are important and are very well run. Prestons Children's Centre sounds like a very well-run enterprise that encourages people and assists children with disabilities. I acknowledge the member for Macquarie Fields raising this important issue.

ENGINEERING PROFESSION

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens) [1.11 p.m.]: Today I advise the House of the state of the engineering profession in Australia—probably the most important yet most underrated profession in the world. Without engineers day-to-day life would be pretty difficult: our power, housing, communications, aircraft, transport, roads and bridges all result from the endeavours and ingenuity of professional engineers. Recently I attended the Engineering Excellence Awards run by the Sydney Division of Engineers Australia—the largest and most diverse professional body for engineers in this country, with 82,000 members. Award nominations were broken into industry and project categories, including such areas as software and embedded systems, welfare health and safety, education and training, through to infrastructure, and building and structures.

The excellence awards recognise the special expertise of individuals who, by applying engineering innovation and demonstrating strong leadership and business skills, have contributed to the success of the projects. The program helps engineers to achieve a clear goal of raising their professional standing by generating greater public awareness of engineers: what they do and how they add real value to the development of our country and our future. All 59 finalists in over 14 categories this year were outstanding: it was quite astounding to realise that our own engineers had achieved these awards. The Bradfield award, named after the great Australian engineer John Bradfield, is the highest possible achievement in Sydney Division. It went to Arup for the National Aquatic Centre in Beijing. One wonders how many people, Australian or otherwise, realise that this acclaimed building was designed by Australian engineers.

The judges noted that each aspect of the structure required engineering initiative and innovation that in many ways extended the boundaries of established practice. The president's award closely follows the Bradfield award in prestige. Once again it was a remarkable achievement for Australian engineers. The freedom wheelchair designed by Lu Papi and Associates has the capability to revolutionise the lives of wheelchair users. Not only will it make everyday life simpler for users and carers, it will also open up the prospect of travel, about which many disabled people may have only dreamed. The chair comes in a few different versions and the lighter one, amazingly, can be fitted in an aircraft overhead baggage compartment. I also congratulate Sydney Division's Professional Engineer of the Year, Professor Hugh Durrant-Whyte. His world-leading work with

robotics and sensor networks—the ability to run a mine in the Pilbara from a terminal in Sydney—and the development of drones and submarines for terrestrial and underwater mapping is at the cutting edge of technology.

I encourage fellow members to look at the showcase book detailing the finalists' entries. I will leave a copy in the Whip's office. Australia has an acute shortage of engineers, for which there could be various reasons, one being that a profession in engineering does not sound attractive to young people. There are no television shows or movies about engineers, and there is not enough exposure of the brilliant engineering achievements just mentioned. Australia can expect to lose about 25,000 engineers by 2011. An estimated 70,000 will retire by 2011, with only 45,000 graduates coming through. Australian government data shows that more than 1,000 eligible applicants for engineering courses at Australian universities failed to secure a place in 2008 due to places simply not being available to these students in our universities. This is disappointing for the students, and it is a tragedy for the profession.

Of the 93 members in this place only three of us are graduate engineers. I acknowledge the member for Rockdale, who is a chemical engineer, and the member for The Entrance, who, like me, is a civil structural engineer. In the Legislative Council, Dr John Kaye has a doctorate in electrical engineering. If you want a legal opinion you can just about ask anyone in this place, but good analytical engineering minds are extremely rare. I believe engineers, with their strong analytical minds and ability to solve problems, are desperately needed in Parliament. I believe the problems this State faces could be solved quite easily if more politicians had the benefit of an engineering background—we are trained to solve rather than create problems. Engineers' achievements can be immortal—what we design today can remain forever.

Unfortunately, many politicians can see only as far as the next election or mini-budget; the recent exodus of New South Wales Government leaders is a graphic example of captains taking to the life rafts as their passengers remain on their reef-bound ship. The Premier's recent appointment of Professor Mary O'Kane as first chief scientist and scientific engineer of New South Wales highlights the great problem faced by the engineering profession—the use of the title "engineer" by all and sundry. Although a computer science graduate, Professor O'Kane is an Honorary Fellow of the Institution of Engineers Australia and would be far more effective if she were appointed as New South Wales Chief Engineer. Remember: all engineers study science in their curriculum; few scientists study engineering.

OUR LADY OF MOUNT CARMEL PRIMARY SCHOOL, WATERLOO, 150TH ANNIVERSARY

Ms KRISTINA KENEALLY (Heffron—Minister for Planning, and Minister for Redfern Waterloo) [1.16 p.m.]: I congratulate Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Waterloo, on its 150th anniversary. On 1 November 1858 Our Lady of Mount Carmel Primary School was founded when Waterloo was under the care of the Benedictine Order. The school was known as the Waterloo Estate School and was first staffed by lay teachers, with the first headmaster being Mr Murtagh. From 1866 the school was supported in giving religious instruction by the Sisters of the Good Samaritan. Demand for the school was strong, with reported enrolments of 290 by 1873 and nearly 500 by 1883. The nature of the original school building is uncertain, but a new school was built in 1873 by Parish Priest Father Cunningham.

In 1980 a new school was built comprising seven classrooms and two offices. The Sisters of Mercy who had taken leadership of the school in 1883, withdrew at the end of 1991, at which time the Sydney Catholic Education Office appointed Ms Rose-Marie Hoekstra as principal. In 2008 there are 113 students, of which approximately 30 per cent come from a non-English-speaking background, and a further 52 per cent are indigenous. Our Lady of Mount Carmel School has provided an outstanding education for 150 years. We look forward to its doing the same in South Sydney for the next 150 years.

At the celebration on 1 November I was joined by the Federal member for Sydney, Tanya Plibersek, the Lord Mayor of Sydney, Clover Moore, and Brother Kelvin Canavan, who is Director of the Catholic Education Office in Sydney. The mass held that night was celebrated by Cardinal George Pell and Parish Priest Father John Knight. The attendance of State, Local and Federal Government representatives, the Cardinal and the Director of the Catholic Education Office indicates not only the deep appreciation South Sydney holds for this wonderful school, Our Lady of Mount Carmel, its history and traditions, but also its continued excellent community work.

Indeed, Our Lady of Mount Carmel has seen significant successes in recent years. Under the leadership of current principal Mrs Susan Clifton, assistant principal Ms Mary Weaver, and dedicated staff, the school has

achieved high standards in both the basic skills test and the newly implemented test for literacy and numeracy. In 2002 the school won an achievement award during National Literacy and Numeracy Week. The children's skills in robotics have seen significant achievements in the ROBO Cup, and the school has mentored teachers and students across the eastern region. For students many achievements extend also to their natural talents on the sporting field, excelling in rugby league, netball and athletics. Several students from Our Lady of Mount Carmel, Waterloo, also have won scholarships to St Joseph's College Hunters Hill: Andrew Hookie, who currently is in year eight at St Joseph's; Latrell Robinson, who is currently in year seven at St Joseph's; and next year Reegan Carr will attend St Joseph's from Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Over the years Our Lady of Mount Carmel has increased its indigenous involvement with strong numbers of students from Aboriginal backgrounds, raising the profile of the school in the local community. I particularly draw to the House's attention the Leadership for Reconciliation Program, which is run in partnership with Sacred Heart School in Mosman. Under the program groups of students from both Mosman Sacred Heart School and Our Lady of Mount Carmel come together in reconciliation and travel to central Australia, where they learn about leadership and indigenous cultures. The students return to their schools and teach others in the Sydney area to go forward in reconciliation and leadership.

Our Lady of Mount Carmel students, together with their counterparts at Mosman, are often called upon to dance, perform, and share their many gifts and talents. Of course, this was done most evidently and with most enthusiasm during World Youth Day 2008, which was recently held here in Sydney. I congratulate Our Lady of Mount Carmel on its 150 years. I look forward to another 150 years of excellent service, supporting the students of Waterloo and Redfern, and indeed all of South Sydney.

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.21 p.m.]: I congratulate the Minister and member for Heffron on her wonderful speech about the 150th anniversary of Our Lady of Mount Carmel. It sounds like a wonderful school. The Sisters of the Good Samaritan and the Sisters of Mercy have done a wonderful job. The diversity of the student base, together with the high Aboriginal and multicultural base, must make it a very interesting school for both the students and the teachers. I also congratulate the principal, Mrs Susan Clifton, on her excellent work, and I congratulate the students on their many and varied achievements.

VIETNAM ASSISTANCE

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [1.22 p.m.]: This being Remembrance Day, a very solemn day marking the end of the First World War, I felt it prudent to bring to the House's attention a trip I undertook to Vietnam on 7 October 2008. The Tweed has the largest Vietnam veteran population in Australia, and I would like to honour a small number of those Vietnam veterans—Brian Vickery, Marvin Everson and Lindsay Scully, who assisted me in organising the visit.

I visited Nui Dat, which is just outside Ho Chi Minh City. In Nui Dat, which is not far from Long Tan—I also visited the memorials to the famous battle many years ago—I attended a local orphanage at Baria supported by the Australian Veterans Vietnam Reconstruction Group. It is a very special place. Originally the orphanage was funded by the Australian Government but in recent times the funding and support have been taken over by Vietnam veterans within the Tweed. Approximately 84 children attend the orphanage.

I was touched by my visit. I spent many hours conversing with the local students and also looking after some of their needs. I took just on 200 food packs to the school. The school is in urgent need of support. The Vietnam veterans in the Tweed do a fabulous job in supporting the orphanage, and they continue to go over there for many months at a time and donate many hours of labour. A large number of Vietnam veterans live in the area surrounding Nui Dat and the site of the famous Long Tan battle. One of those veterans, Trevor McGaw—or Mack as he is known up there—formerly lived on the Sunshine Coast. Trevor has a lovely wife, Lyn, who is a native Vietnamese. Mack is very special indeed. He runs a rabbit farm, which assists low-income farmers in establishing their own businesses and supplements their income.

Vietnam is an ever-developing nation. I was very touched by my experience. It was my first visit to a country that Australia was at war with. I was a little uncertain about the reactions I would get from the local people, but there was nothing but praise. The praise, whether it was from the orphanages or the local schools, stemmed from the Australian spirit to go back and try to help these people. I was very touched. I met a number of ex-Vietnamese soldiers, or freedom fighters as they refer to them over there, or Vietcong as they have been named in the past, and there was no animosity. But there was a great deal of thanks in their eyes and so on for the great help we provide them.

I also had the opportunity to visit the Da Nang Hospital, a very large hospital with some 1,800 beds. That hospital is very special. Recently the Tweed hospital and Da Nang hospital signed a memorandum of understanding that will see specialists from here—doctors, nurses, et cetera—go over there and work for three or four months. In return Vietnamese doctors will come out here. The hospitals in Vietnam suffer overcrowding problems similar to those suffered in our hospital system. The Da Nang Hospital staff told me that the hospital has 1,800 beds but often it has 2,000 patients. They top and tail the patients—a practice that I hope we will not see in Australia. One of the leading doctors at Da Nang hospital, Dr Ian McPhee, has been instrumental in formulating the memorandum of understanding.

While I was in Da Nang I also visited one of the local primary schools. The school has around 800 students and it is one of the most modern schools there. I took the liberty of taking a large amount of information from one of our local schools, Kingscliff primary school, which is a great school. The Kingscliff primary school students painted pictures and wrote notes to their fellow students in Vietnam, and Vietnamese students are writing back. So there is now a bond between Kingscliff primary school and Da Nang primary school. My vision—and I believe it will come to fruition—is that students and teachers from both Vietnam and Australia will trade places and work. If we ultimately develop a greater understanding of other cultures and a greater level of respect for them we can only move forward from that. As I said, it was very touching to see the young Vietnamese students praising us in English. Once again, I am 100 per cent for the Tweed.

MAITLAND PARK HOCKEY CENTRE

Mr FRANK TERENCE (Maitland) [1.27 p.m.]: On Saturday 16 August 2008 I attended the official opening of a brand new state-of-the-art international hockey centre at Maitland Park. The new hockey ground has been funded by the New South Wales Government to the tune of \$1.37 million, thanks to the great efforts of my predecessor, John Price, the former member for Maitland, and has been realised in conjunction with the great efforts of Maitland City Council. The centre has been constructed in a way that is consistent with and complementary to the historic nature of Maitland Park. The construction comprises a broad-looped hybrid synthetic grass that is water-filled and certified by the International Hockey Federation as suitable for international competition.

The official duties on the day were performed by none other than the Federal member for Hunter and Minister for Defence, the Hon. Joel Fitzgibbon. It was good to have him back in town. Whilst there were several dignitaries present, the one person who was the driving force behind the realisation of this great venue was the then Councillor Tony Keating, now retired, who lobbied and campaigned long and hard in council and throughout the community together with my predecessor, the former member for Maitland, John Price. Tony Keating, who was a councillor on Maitland City Council for eight years in the north ward, made an enormous contribution over those two terms to many community causes in and around Maitland. Tony Keating saw the potential and the value of a sporting facility such as this, and spent many years working hard for its fruition.

Our new hockey centre not only will provide Maitland with a new sporting facility but also, because of its international grading, will attract interest and the presence of sporting and hockey players far and wide. I have visited the centre on a number of occasions with school and community groups who have taken part in sporting events held at the venue, and I can say it is second to none. It is simply superb and totally fitting for our area. Together with the other codes in the park, such as tennis, netball and swimming, it is an exciting new addition to our sporting facilities available to the community.

The hockey centre is an example of how one person's vision, followed by uninterrupted commitment, persistence and a never-say-die attitude, can bring about enormous results. The realisation of a world-class hockey centre at Maitland is an important accomplishment that cannot be understated. I pay tribute to Tony Keating for his commitment to the project and for being the driving force behind this great result, without which we would not have this great hockey centre. It is also important to acknowledge the great cooperation of the Maitland City Council. For many years the council has looked after the logistics and gave land to the community on which to base the new facility.

It is also important to note the support of the community. Maitland's community is growing at the rate of 2.3 per cent. With such a rate of growth comes the need for extra services and infrastructure. I hear most often in the Maitland community calls for roads, bridges, hospitals and police, but it is also very important to acknowledge that the growing community needs sporting facilities, especially for young people. As I watched the students of Iona Public School use the new hockey facility, it gave me the utmost pleasure because it is all about the young people in our community making use of sporting facilities, especially one that is of an international, world-class standard.

The hockey centre will be a great addition to our inventory of sporting facilities. We have all sorts of sporting facilities including soccer, rugby league, baseball, tennis and swimming, but the hockey centre ranks at the very top of the list as far as the quality of venues is concerned. I am very proud of that. I must acknowledge the great efforts of the former member for Maitland, John Price, who, over a period of eight years, brought many benefits to the community. I acknowledge in this House that he was one of the movers and shakers who was instrumental in the creation of this venue. We are very proud to have that new facility.

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.31 p.m.]: The \$1.37 million hockey stadium in Maitland is one that the member for Maitland should be very proud of. I acknowledge also that the former member for Maitland, Mr John Price, worked very hard to have the stadium constructed, and Councillor Tony Keating, who is a very persistent man, also is deserving of praise. I am really proud that in the Hunter area we have a world-class hockey centre. It is great to see the cooperation between the Maitland City Council and the State Government in supporting the growing community of Maitland. I pay homage to the member for Maitland for acknowledging this wonderful centre. I look forward to seeing it.

HAWKESBURY RIVER FISHING INDUSTRY

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [1.32 p.m.]: The Hawkesbury River is a significant part of the Hornsby electorate. This mighty body of water forms the boundary between Hornsby and the Central Coast. It is home to a number of river communities and supports a fishing industry that is vital to the food basket of Sydney. Fishermen in the area have been harvesting and supplying seafood since 1946. Not long ago the QX parasite completely destroyed the oyster industry as a result of the combination of drought, low water flows, raw sewage flowing into the Hawkesbury and toxins from salvinia weed harvesting. Luckily, due to the perseverance of a handful of oyster farmers, the oyster industry resurfaced and is showing a tremendous comeback in the face of oblivion, with Pacific oysters and some Sydney rock oysters, which are QX resistant, growing strongly. The oyster industry is managed from headquarters in Mooney Mooney.

I draw attention to the Hawkesbury-Nepean Catchment Management Authority and its excellent newsletter the *Source*, which deals with natural resource and environmental issues as well as projects in the Hawkesbury-Nepean. The catchment area is of national significance, not least because of its association with the fishing industry. Over time I have had a number of meetings with members of the fishing community. The most recent occurred when I took the shadow Minister for Primary Industries, Andrew Fraser, to Brooklyn to discuss various issues currently facing fishers on the Hawkesbury. I thank Rolf Norrington and Mary Howard for their invaluable help and instruction in assisting me to understand the problems that are facing the industry—problems that will result in serious damage to the fishing industry if the Labor Government does not heed cries for assistance.

Over the years a number of studies have been undertaken of the health of the Hawkesbury River. In 2002 the Regulation Review Committee of this Parliament made one such report on fisheries management and aquaculture. Finally, a few years ago, when the health of the river was rated poorly, community calls for providing sewerage for Brooklyn, Dangar Island and other communities were heeded. In the Hornsby electorate, the connections are almost complete. It is a shame that the Government did not add recycling to the installation: fishermen are very concerned about the outfall under the road bridge and the exclusion zone around it. The mandatory introduction of square mesh codends is of major concern to local fishers. Rolf Norrington maintains that research completed in one estuary should not dictate decisions for all estuaries. He wants a 12-month extension at least to the introduction scheduled for 1 January 2009 so that Hawkesbury-specific research can be undertaken. One size does not fit all.

There must be individual estuary-based management. The department is not listening to all fishers who want input into decision making. The present information sharing is not good enough. There is one management advisory committee meeting per year, which is appalling when there should be two—the entire estuarine complex cannot be managed from Cronulla. Restrictions on commercial fishing on weekends and public holidays are seriously impeding the ability of fishers to do their work and cater for the market. *Egeria densa* weed is a massive problem in the Hawkesbury and elsewhere, but the scientific study that would assist fishers to deal with it has not been released. I ask the Minister when the report is likely to be released. Uniqueness and sensitive nature must be taken into account when the Labor Government is making decisions about the fishing industry and its future.

Mary Howard has produced a wonderful poster and presentation titled "Aquatic Ecosystem Productivity Relies on Water Managers and Sustainable Cities". It depicts rainfall and prawn catches, and

compares these indicators to fishing businesses—the latter of which are dropping in numbers. Sydney's population growth needs to be monitored alongside environmental studies. The Hawkesbury is the second-largest prawn trawl fishery in New South Wales and it is the only squid trawl fishery. To provide sustainable water management for cities, the aquatic ecosystems in the rivers and estuaries require variable seasonal flows of aquatic ecosystem quality water. There must be the ability to compensate for the deterioration of habitat across catchments as a result of diffuse pollution and constant effluent flows.

Other concerns about regulatory compliance exist, and cost is a huge factor. The industry pays a boat licence fee to NSW Maritime for registration of fishing vessels, and the New South Wales Department of Primary Industries also charges a fee for the same boat to be registered to a fishing business owner. This is duplication. The industry also pays a licence fee to the Food Authority that provides a through-chain tracing of all seafood for human consumption. NSW Fisheries charges a fish receiver's licence to trace the food from the producer to the retailer. This is another instance of duplication.

I thank Rolf Norrington and Mary Howard for their assistance, and the Prawn Trawler Association for information it provided. These are sensible people who do not fish over seagrass: they worry incessantly about the health of the Hawkesbury River. They want to do their utmost to make sure it is not overfished and that appropriate decisions are made for its management to protect the ecosystem for present and future generations. It is vitally important for the Rees Labor Government to listen to what the fishers around the Hawkesbury have to say. Their voices must be heard and their concerns must be taken into account rather than ignored, if the future of the Hawkesbury as a fishing area is to be assured.

TAFE NSW

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [1.37 p.m.]: TAFE employees, local businesses and employer representatives plus other interested people who are gravely concerned that the Federal Government is proposing to make all funding in the vocational education and training sector contestable and to implement a student loans scheme met in Tamworth last Friday. The proposal has come as a great shock to many local people, who see it clearly as a move to privatise TAFE. The feedback I am receiving is united and unequivocal—leave our TAFE alone. At the meeting it was pointed out that morale was already low among TAFE staff due to constant restructuring, and there was a feeling that the whole system is continually being dumbed down.

TAFE is held in very high regard in all of the communities I have the honour of representing, and the investment that recently has been made locally in TAFE, plus some of its significant achievements, have been brought to the fore to raise public awareness about TAFE's role in the community. In Gunnedah, the Try-A-Trade initiative was launched last week. The Gunnedah District Development Board, Careers Network and the BHP Billiton Coal Project developed this project with the aim of encouraging the next generation of young apprentices to seek information about possible trade career choices. It involves year 9 students from Gunnedah, Quirindi and Narrabri, and offered those potential apprentices an opportunity to experience up to three trade areas, and to discuss career options with current apprentices and qualified tradesmen.

During the official opening of Try-A-Trade, another event took place that really highlighted the value of our TAFE system. Fourteen year 10 students graduated with their Certificate I in Metals and Engineering after undertaking a Career Engagement Program at Gunnedah TAFE. Importantly, they have already secured, or are close to obtaining, local employment to further their apprenticeships. Until recently, most of these young people would have had to leave Gunnedah to find employment. I congratulate those fourteen students: Matt Zelinsky, Craig Paterson, Jackson Foster, Matthew Baker, Luke Smith, Robert McKinnon, Zakarii Insch, Joe Smyth, Joshua Mapperson, Matthew Buck, Brayden Smith, Daniel McKinnon, Gus Etheridge and Boyde Campbell on their commitment in achieving these wonderful results. I also thank the local Gunnedah businesses that are providing the apprenticeship opportunities. Most importantly, I acknowledge the students' TAFE coordinator, Steve Wicks, who won Trade Teacher of the Year—Manufacturing at the Institute of Trade Schools Excellence Awards 2008.

On Monday last week I was honoured to officially open the new \$6.3 million light automotive and electrotechnology facilities at the Tamworth campus of the New England Institute. After praising both the State and Federal governments for cooperatively investing in the Tamworth TAFE to address nationwide skills shortages, I find it extremely ironic that today I am joining with concerned residents to fight for the very existence of TAFE as we know it. Total enrolment at the Tamworth campus increased by 15 per cent between 2006 and 2007, with year-to-date enrolments for 2008 showing a further 7 per cent growth over last year.

Tamworth campus is our major centre for trade training across a range of apprenticeship areas and it is the only provider of trade training for light automotive and electrotechnology apprentices in New England and north-west New South Wales—both these areas experience significant skill shortages.

Reassuringly, apprenticeship enrolments in automotive trades have grown 19.6 per cent between 2005 and 2008. The new facilities at Tamworth campus should help continue that trend in the 24 automotive courses offered. The electrotechnology section provides technical education for 300 students from trade apprenticeships, post trade, prevocational and school-based study in electrical, refrigeration and air conditioning, electronics and electrical engineering courses. Electrotechnology enrolments at the Tamworth campus have grown by 75 per cent between 2005 and 2008 and long-term enrolment growth prospects remain positive. It would be an absolute disaster to even contemplate moving to a system focused solely on delivering courses that make a profit. Students would bear the brunt of these reforms, paying higher costs with fewer choices, as the burden of vocational education and training [VET] funding is shifted from the Government to the public.

Already, competition on price has damaged TAFE—we have seen the ill-considered foray into the trade education system by the former Federal Government—and it is further exacerbating skills shortages in some of our traditional trades. With for-profit private providers cherry picking the most lucrative courses, TAFE institutes will have to cut costs in crucial areas to win their share of a shrinking pot. They will have to employ more casual teachers—further undermining students' learning—while TAFE institutes in regional and rural areas will simply struggle to survive. It has always been hard to maintain large class sizes in country campuses, and escalating student fees will compound the problem.

Local computer courses are no longer available, and whole sections have been closed in areas vital to our future, including bricklaying in Tamworth, and horticulture in Gunnedah. In my opinion, the only profit that should be made through education is the profit to the individual that comes from gaining knowledge and skills. The loud message from country communities is that TAFE must not be allowed to become a victim of an ideological and ill-considered push towards a privatised system.

PUBLIC HEALTH SYSTEM

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [1.42 p.m.]: As a local member, and a member of the Opposition, the feedback I sometimes give to the public health system is derived from the many complaints that are received in my office. Today I will break that mould and talk about the very good health professionals in the New South Wales public health system. On the weekend my young son Nathaniel, who is five years old, suffered a serious accident. He fell about four metres from an internal balcony in our house and landed on a cement floor covered only by carpet and some underlay. He was pretty badly hurt and, naturally, his mother and I were very concerned.

Immediately following the accident he was seriously distressed, he could not walk—he was only able to crawl—and he had a large lump on his head. We immediately took him to the Wauchope District Memorial Hospital, where the staff were nothing short of fantastic. I refer in particular to nurse Bridie who looked after us immediately, but all the nurses were excellent in their response. The local doctor on call, Dr Brenton Schuetz—with whom I surf from time to time on the mid North Coast—came to the hospital almost immediately to assess Nathaniel. Nathaniel was put in a neck brace and hooked up to a drip for transportation to Port Macquarie Base Hospital. The service we received was outstanding and timely for a young fellow who was not only very distressed but also was a little overawed by being in a hospital where doctors were poking and prodding him.

Our experience continued in the back of the ambulance with paramedic Nerida and her partner as we were transported to Port Macquarie Base Hospital. I cannot speak highly enough of the paramedics based at Wauchope who make the trip to Port Macquarie Base Hospital all too often. On arrival at that hospital we were ushered into the emergency department—I am pleased to say that that department will receive some interim funds from the Government to make it more operational. Some wonderful nurses saw to us almost immediately—I do not know their names but they will know who they are. They were terrific with young Nathaniel, my wife, Cathy, and me. An outstanding young doctor named Matt—again I do not know his surname but he appeared to be of Kiwi origin—left no stone unturned in performing the appropriate tests to ensure that Nathaniel was not suffering from a serious spinal injury or a skull fracture—the very things that we feared.

This story has a very good ending, which does not only involve my breaking the mould and praising our health professionals and the health system in general: young Nat, as we call him, has almost fully recovered. The doctors were amazed that within a few hours of such a fall Nat was walking and talking as the chirpy,

normal little boy that he is. Although he has a bump on his head, a bruise on his chest, and a sore foot, there appears to be no significant injury. That said, the treatment that he, my wife and I received at the hands of these young health professionals contributed to the outstanding outcome. We were in the emergency department of the Port Macquarie Base Hospital on a Saturday evening when staff were battening down the hatches for a traditional Saturday night, but nothing was too much trouble for them.

Mr Kerry Hickey: It is a great health system.

Mr ANDREW STONER: It is a very good health system with very good people in it. However, it could be better managed and better funded, but that is the province of the Government, which should do more to support the wonderful doctors and nurses in our public hospital system. I would be happy to debate the matter with the member for Cessnock any day.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.47 p.m.]: I send the wishes of the Government to the Leader of The Nationals, his wife and son Nathaniel. The Leader of The Nationals has outlined what would be a traumatic experience for any family, but his experience shows that health care in New South Wales remains an important priority for the Government. As outlined in today's mini-budget, the public health system in New South Wales is a top-spending priority.

The Minister for Health and the New South Wales public health system will continue to offer universal and high quality health care in tough economic times but, like all government agencies, it must strive to achieve further efficiencies. The service outlined by the Leader of The Nationals was delivered with commitment and passion, whether it was the ambulance service, the first triage nurse at Wauchope District Memorial Hospital or staff in the emergency department of the Port Macquarie Base Hospital. I thank those workers and I thank the Premier for keeping health the key priority of the New South Wales mini-budget.

CESSNOCK PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Mr KERRY HICKEY (Cessnock) [1.48 p.m.]: Madam Deputy Speaker, as you come from Cessnock you will relate to my private member's statement on the importance of transport to the community of Cessnock. Cessnock has no public transport system; it relies heavily upon the private transport system provided by Rover Coaches, which is under the management of Mr Aaron Lewis who presently is surveying people at the Morisset railway station to determine whether there should be a bus service from Cessnock to Morisset. The Ministry for Transport has requested, and expects, that the hardworking providers of transport across the whole of regional and rural New South Wales will demonstrate a need for a bus service from Cessnock to Morisset.

I have raised this issue many times in this House. We have petitions and statements from community members about the need for a transport service between Cessnock and Morisset. The survey is being conducted not only at Morisset railway station but also at Maitland railway station, where commuters are expected to fill in a form explaining why they travel to Sydney. As the local member I have the misfortune—or fortune, I suppose—to travel by rail to the Cessnock electorate on occasions. The trip from Central Station to Cessnock is six hours and another hour is spent on the bus from Maitland to Cessnock. If the transport ministry bestowed upon Cessnock electorate a route to Morisset the trip would be shortened to three hours.

This is where the lunacy lies. Bureaucrats in the Ministry of Transport are arguing the need for these services. We have the community and the transport provider on side. The Chief Executive Officer of Rover Coaches has streamlined his business. He has cut many thousands of kilometres from his routes for the benefit of the business. Private transport providers are expected to do that. Now the ministry is saying that, because Rover Coaches streamlined its business before it was asked to do so, it must streamline the business even further before it can be given more kilometres to run a service between Cessnock and Morisset.

The Cessnock electorate has many communities that were built on poppet heads, which were built on top of mines. Villages such as Ellalong, Paxton and Millfield sprung up around the mines. The people in those villages, who are mostly elderly, need transport in the Cessnock community. To streamline his business the owner of Rover Coaches has had to cut services to the community. How bizarre is that? The Ministry of Transport needs to look at what this provider has done to get the substantive business he has today. He has streamlined and he has made cuts to make an extremely good business. Now the bureaucrats are saying, "Because you've done all that we won't allow you to open another route. We won't give you more kilometres." How bizarre is that for a community that is six hours travelling time from Sydney? It takes local residents six hours to get to medical appointments in Sydney for major health problems. Frankly, that is bizarre.

We may be providing community transport and other aspects of transport in the community, but this bus route is needed now. The community has been waiting years for this service. The Ministry of Transport should provide either a bus service or a train service to Cessnock—the lines are there. The community should not be suffering or going without. It deserves better. I ask the Minister responsible to look at what the Ministry of Transport is doing to this provider and ensure that my community receives the same delivery of service as that of many communities across the Sydney electorates.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith—Parliamentary Secretary) [1.53 p.m.]: I thank the member for Cessnock for speaking so passionately about bus services in his area. Much can be said about bus services in rural and regional New South Wales, particularly in relation to the network of communities. It is vital to have connections between communities. Similarly, in the Penrith electorate and the lower Blue Mountains, roads connect many communities, and vast distances must often be travelled to get to medical appointments. Private operators provide bus services in the Penrith and Cessnock electorates. I commend the bus service operator, Rover Coaches, for surveying local residents.

At present a similar survey is being conducted in Penrith by Westbus. The constituents and bus users of Penrith have until about 8 December to complete a survey and tell the Ministry of Transport what they require. As the member for Cessnock articulated, bus users know what is commonsense in their area. They know where they need to get to and when they need to get there. The member for Cessnock acknowledged community transport. The great community transport scheme in my area assists commuters to get to medical appointments. I commend the member for Cessnock, and I look forward to further instalments about the Ministry of Transport.

CHELTENHAM RAILWAY STATION

Mr GREG SMITH (Epping) [1.55 p.m.]: I do not think this is an organised conspiracy against the transport department, but I refer to the outrageous attack on the commuters of Cheltenham by RailCorp blocking access to the waiting room on Cheltenham station. This RailCorp decision, like so many others, was made without any consultation and, once again, shows the State Government's contempt for the commuters of Cheltenham. Blocking off the waiting room at Cheltenham without any meaningful notification or consultation is ridiculous, and I will not tolerate such a vicious assault on my electorate; neither will the good people of Cheltenham and especially not the worthy Beecroft-Cheltenham Civic Trust. The first information commuters had about these changes was when they arrived at Cheltenham station and went to take a seat in the waiting room and saw it all boarded up.

Is this what counts as consultation for this State Government? It has put up a wall, again. People can draw their own inference. There was not even a sign on the construction site to tell commuters what was going on behind the plywood boarding. Commuters were left to gather what was happening for themselves. When residents called RailCorp they gained little information and were usually met with a run-around. When my office contacted RailCorp it took days to get a reply as to what was going on, and it was quite aggressive. This is not good enough when it comes to notification. With significant changes such as this the community should be informed and invited to make representations, not be left out in the cold and told nothing. Cheltenham station already has few areas undercover and protected from the elements, and the loss of the waiting room is a severe blow to local commuters and the station's amenity.

In wet weather a lot of people wait in the waiting room for cars to approach the parking area—there is very little parking area—and to get into the car so that they do not get wet. It is ridiculous for the Government to turn a waiting room, which services the public, into a communications room. While new facilities at Cheltenham station are welcomed, they cannot come at the expense of putting commuters out in the cold. There are plenty of places in close proximity to Cheltenham station where a communications room could be established without jeopardising the amenity of local commuters. It could be added on to where the staff have their rooms. However, the Government, by its actions, seems hell bent on jeopardising the amenity of local commuters at Cheltenham rather than expanding services at the station.

I have written to the Minister for Transport and requested that he outline the State Government's plans for the station, and demanded that the waiting room not be lost to commuters. Unfortunately, it seems the Government's actions have rendered the waiting room already lost. It is now time the Government committed to building a new waiting room for Cheltenham commuters, and providing them with protection from the elements. Hopefully, the Minister will finally commit to Cheltenham residents and provide them with this valuable amenity. Unfortunately, the people of Cheltenham and Beecroft have often been victims of the work of RailCorp and the Transport Infrastructure Development Corporation [TIDC]. First the residents were

traumatised a couple of years ago by plans to send the north-west rail link through the village green, which would have had a devastating impact on the local environment and community. After more than 800 submissions were made TIDC withdrew that proposal.

Recently the community has been inconvenienced by the redevelopment of the Copeland Road bridge. This project should have been finished months ago but, because of the Government's inability to deliver infrastructure, the people of Cheltenham are still living with the inconvenience. I thank the President of the Beecroft-Cheltenham Civic Trust, Colin Johnston, the former president, Caroline Watt, and the former Hornsby councillor and deputy mayor, Felicity Findlay, for their tireless efforts in standing up for the community on this issue. Their work is a great credit to the community and the care that Cheltenham residents have for their local environment.

Commuters at Cheltenham already put up with the latest running trains on the network, thanks to Labor, and they will not even be able to sit under cover while forced to wait for their train. This simply is not good enough. Minister Campbell must make a commitment to Cheltenham commuters. We have had news today that we will be penalised if we drive over the Sydney Harbour Bridge or through the harbour tunnel during working hours. People in other areas of Sydney are not so penalised. Again, it is not fair to tax people who do not live in Labor electorates and who are not provided with proper public transport. In particular, the residents of the north-west have been let down badly. Approximately 300,000 people reside there, with no proper public transport. The Government talk about 100 buses. It needs 1,000 buses! Where will it get drivers from anyway? Those people cannot be discriminated against forever.

GLENDORE PUBLIC SCHOOL KDC-NRMA TECHNOPUSH CHALLENGE

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [2.00 p.m.]: I know that members are curious about which public school in the Wallsend electorate participated in the KDC-NRMA TechnoPush Challenge. To assuage members' curiosity I will tell them: the very special school is Glendore Public School. Where is Glendore Public School? It is a relatively new school, only 10 years young, situated in Maryland in the picturesque Blue Gum Hills precinct. And guess what? It was the only public school in the Newcastle and Lake Macquarie regions to participate in the challenge. The TechnoPush Challenge, which was held at Eastern Creek raceway in August this year, was a very exciting program. The students, the teachers and the local community of Glendore Public School worked together to design and construct a vehicle to detailed specifications. The whole project was spread over a number of months and incorporated learning outcomes in science and technology and strong links with English, maths and physical activity.

All students in stage three, that is years 5 and 6, were involved in the initial planning stages. The children gained much knowledge in the area of design and in the science of using different materials to help create a light vehicle that was also fast and durable. Students also were required to design a name for their team and a logo for their cart and to be involved in the building of the pushcart. The final participation team was chosen, which included a pushing team, a building team and a presentation team. After much deliberation the team became known as the Glendore Thundering Thunderbirds. What a fitting name for these clever kids! The students also created endurance programs prior to the challenge to improve their physical strength and ability to push and steer the cart.

I had much delight in visiting the school prior to the challenge to meet the students and to be shown the final product. The students were extremely excited about what they had achieved and the challenge that lay ahead. I was allowed the opportunity of sitting in the pushcart and I had a photo taken with the children. I enjoyed the demonstration and was impressed at the speed and mobility of the cart. The front-wheel drive and effective brakes created a lean, mean, racing machine. The students of Glendore Public School were interviewed by local media and were proud representatives of our region. They travelled to Sydney on 20 August 2008, along with teachers Mr David Ralston and Mr Wayne Pearson and principal Mr Les Corrigan. A number of parents also travelled to the event to cheer on the students. I was advised that all had a fantastic day. Glendore Public School students competed in an obstacle course, an endurance race and sprint races and gave a presentation showing every aspect from design to the final product.

The team came third in the endurance race and second in the sprint races. Very reliable sources inform me that the pushcart held together problem free throughout the events. For the school's first entry into this challenge, the students did extremely well and should be proud of their accomplishment. Learning a great deal from their first experience at pushcarting, the students have picked up some helpful tips for next year's team.

Watch out Eastern Creek in 2009! It is remarkable to see these children participating in such an exciting event from which they have learned so much. I look forward to their participation in next year's challenge and in future years as up-and-coming designers or maybe even race car drivers.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith—Parliamentary Secretary) [2.04 p.m.]: I commend the member for Wallsend for bringing to the attention of the House the KDC-NRMA TechnoPush Challenge held at Eastern Creek. I congratulate all those involved, particularly the teachers, parents and community of Glendore Public School who assisted in getting the school team to western Sydney to participate in the TechnoPush Challenge. It sounds like the Glendore Thundering Thunderbirds had a remarkable day. As a former teacher with a strong connection to the science and technology syllabus I commend this program. These types of programs provide challenges to solve problems, such as the materials to use to make a cart faster or more durable, and marketing skills, such as creating a team name and logo. This real-life experience is beneficial to students when they go out into the world to work and, hopefully, promote the TechnoPush Challenge.

SCHOOL STUDENT TRANSPORT SCHEME

Mr PETER BESSELING (Port Macquarie) [2.05 p.m.]: This afternoon I speak on an issue that has significant relevance to both my electorate and the mini-budget delivered today by the Government. I specifically refer to the transportation of schoolchildren and their access to schools using the School Student Transport Scheme. The Port Macquarie electorate, like many regional and rural areas, is faced with transport challenges. Often the only solution is the use of private motor vehicles, as alternatives are not supported, too expensive, inconvenient or simply do not stack up due to safety and lack of infrastructure. Today's decision by the State Government to introduce an annual co-payment to the School Student Transport Scheme will have a marked effect on communities within the Port Macquarie electorate, with many of the households affected coming from lower socioeconomic positions and bearing the burden of the tyranny of distance that is faced by most rural and regional areas.

I have received many letters and emails from concerned parents and community groups fearful of the effects that any reduction in the scheme will have upon their families. I am not talking just about the families who will receive some form of reprieve through the Government's hardship assistance provisions; I speak on behalf of all families who are working towards building a better future for their children by entering the workforce to get that little bit of breathing space between themselves and their mortgages and other bills. Their lives are affected by every single added expense, such as rate increases, parking fines or, in this case, an increase in the cost of sending their children to school. In rural and regional areas parents are locked into this added expense of bus travel because of the lack of alternatives available to send their children to school. The train is not a viable option for students within the Port Macquarie electorate because it runs nowhere near most major towns and, as part of the CountryLink service, shoots through smaller towns on its way from Sydney to the far North Coast.

The situation of parents dropping off their children to school by private vehicle will increase as a result of today's decision on the School Student Transport Scheme. However, many families will face the difficult task of juggling work commitments and will have to either sacrifice the precious little time they already have with their children at home or face an extra fee to send their children to school. Taxis are available but because of the low socioeconomic situation of many within our community are not a viable option, as they are considered too expensive and out of reach of many constituents to use on a regular basis. Taxis would be a far more expensive option for families than the added cost of the bus transport. I would encourage and support school students, parents and the general community to walk or ride to their school or place of work as we have a terrific environment to enjoy such healthy opportunities. The more people that we can get out and about the better for our health, the less pressure on our local health system and the greater the social interaction. Also, it will set a good example for future generations.

Sadly lacking, however, is the associated social and health infrastructure, such as combined bicycle and walking pathways, which would encourage broader use of this form of travel and allow parents to feel that their children were safe travelling to school. Currently children are forced to walk or ride on busy roads to get to school, and that is only in areas where their school is located nearby. Many children do not have this option because of the distance they are required to travel to attend school. Therefore, it is apparent that the most popular means of transport for schoolchildren of many families within the Port Macquarie electorate is the existing bus service. The added costs now associated with catching a bus to and from school will be borne by families within our community. In an area where travelling distances are significant, alternative transport options are limited and school catchment areas are widespread it is important that the Government recognises the significant role that bus transport plays.

Question—That private members' statements be noted—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Private members' statements noted.

[The Deputy-Speaker left the chair at 2.10 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

ASSENT TO BILLS

Assent to the following bills reported:

Children and Young Persons (Care and Protection) Amendment (Body Piercing and Tattooing) Bill 2008
Mental Health Legislation Amendment (Forensic Provisions) Bill 2008
Vexatious Proceedings Bill 2008
Crimes (Sentencing Procedure) Amendment (Victim Impact Statements) Bill 2008
Road Transport (Driver Licensing) Amendment (Demerit Points System) Bill 2008
Tow Truck Industry Amendment Bill 2008
Civil Liability Legislation Amendment Bill 2008

ADMINISTRATION OF THE GOVERNMENT OF THE STATE

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

J. J. SPIGELMAN
Lieutenant-Governor

Office of the Governor
Sydney, 5 November 2008

The Honourable James Jacob Spigelman, Chief Justice of New South Wales, Lieutenant-Governor of the State of New South Wales, has the honour to inform the Legislative Assembly that, consequent on the Governor of New South Wales, Professor Marie Bashir, having assumed the administration of the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia, he has this day assumed the administration of the Government of the State.

REMEMBRANCE DAY

Ministerial Statement

Mr NATHAN REES (Toongabbie—Premier, and Minister for the Arts) [2.16 p.m.]: For all Australians—and especially for members of this Parliament—Remembrance Day this year has a special significance, a special poignancy. Not only is this the ninetieth anniversary of that first Remembrance Day and all it stands for, not only are we honouring, as always, the courage and sacrifice of the thousands of Australians who gave their lives in the First World War in defence of our country and its values but today we are also honouring, in a unique way, the memory of one of our own—the first member of this Parliament to be awarded the Victoria Cross, the nation's highest decoration for valour.

Recent days and weeks have brought many reminders of the heroism and sacrifice of our soldiers in the First World War. Like all Australians, honourable members will have learnt with feelings of sorrow, not unmixed with relief, of the recent discovery in the French village of Fromelles of a mass grave containing the remains of some 400 Australian and British soldiers. We have followed with pride the visit to Fromelles by Australia's new Governor-General, Quentin Bryce, and her earlier visit to the Australian war memorial at Villers-Bretonneux, that little corner of France where some 2,500 Australians were killed or wounded in battle.

Last night I had the honour of switching on special lighting at the Opera House to bathe the sails in red—traditionally the colour of sacrifice. And today I participated in a wreath-laying ceremony at the Cenotaph, observing a minute's silence in memory of the fallen. These are familiar ceremonies—honoured by time and custom and deeply embedded in the consciousness of our people—but familiarity will never dim the memory of those who gave their lives or diminish their place in the hearts of Australians. In war there are countless unsung, unknown heroes and perhaps no individual should take precedence in our thoughts when we honour the service of the many.

But it is natural that members of this Parliament should wish to preserve the memory of William Matthew Currey, a former member for Kogarah, who served in the AIF in Peronne, in France, and was awarded the Victoria Cross. William Currey was the first Victoria Cross winner to serve in this Parliament. At the outbreak of war he understated his age and twice attempted to enlist without his parents' consent. It is fitting that

we should honour his memory with the erection of a commemorative plaque in the Speaker's Square. I ask members to reflect on the lessons of the terrible war in which he fought and honour the memory of all those brave Australians whose valour and sacrifice we commemorate on this solemn day of remembrance.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [2.22 p.m.]: I join with the Premier in commemorating this ninetieth anniversary of Remembrance Day. At a time when the population of this country was less than 5 million, 416,000 Australian men volunteered to serve in World War I and 2,500 women joined up to be nurses. Of the 330,000 people who served overseas, one in five died—63,000 people. Another 156,000 men and women were injured—injuries that, as we heard at the Cenotaph today, did not end when they were fixed in hospital. Too many of those people—men in particular—carried injuries for the rest of their lives, and in many cases, as a result, their lives were shortened.

On days like this we commemorate the actions of those people who served this country with a single purpose: to defend the freedom and opportunity that existed for them before 1914. In addition to Bill Currey—the only Victoria Cross recipient to serve in this Parliament—we are reminded of two others from this Chamber who died in the Gallipoli campaign: George Braund, the Liberal member for Armidale, and Ted Larkin, the Labor member for Willoughby, who died at Lone Pine and The Nek during that amazing Gallipoli campaign.

Across this State are memorials to the men and women who responded to the call—the call of freedom—to ensure that we enjoy the freedoms that we have in this country today. Freedoms that we take for granted are freedoms that were won for us by people such as Bill Currey, who, thankfully, survived his service and died peacefully in 1948, and George Braund and Ted Larkin, who, regrettably, gave their lives for those things we now hold dear. Members of the Opposition, and I am sure the Independent members of this place also, join to commemorate all those who served this country and we acknowledge the ninetieth anniversary of this important end of the First World War.

The SPEAKER: The House joins with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in commemorating Remembrance Day. I ask all members to rise as a mark of respect.

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

MINISTRY

Mr NATHAN REES: I inform the House that on 4 November 2008, in accordance with section 36 of the Constitution Act 1902, Her Excellency the Governor authorised, firstly, that the Hon. Ian Michael Macdonald, MLC, act for and on behalf of the Minister for Small Business and, secondly, Ms Jodi Leyanne McKay, MP, act for and on behalf of the Minister for Science and Medical Research and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer). I also inform the House that the Minister for Education and Training and Minister for Women will represent the Acting Minister for Small Business in the Legislative Assembly.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

Government Business Notices of Motions (for Bills) given.

QUESTION TIME

MINI-BUDGET FAMILY COSTS

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: I direct my question to the Premier. Given that his Federal Labor colleagues have introduced an economic stimulus package of \$10 billion, including help for Labor's so-called working families, how can the Premier possibly justify slugging New South Wales' families with fees on school travel for their kids, higher road tolls, higher parking fees, increases to greenslips, higher fares for public transport, greater costs for child care and higher rents for their units and businesses?

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: The gravity of the international circumstances with regard to finance clearly has been lost on the Opposition. The difficulty of the situation we face has been manifest over recent weeks and today the Government has outlined a budget that will correct the mistakes of the past and set up New South Wales for the future.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: The budget delivered today is tough but it is fair. It provides \$3,000 in additional assistance for first home buyers, some 80 new places for special needs teachers to help students with remedial reading problems, dyslexia, autism, and so on. The budget is tough but fair. We have handed in our exam paper in these times. The Opposition has not handed in its yet. This is a test for the Leader of the Opposition as much as it is a test for anyone.

PUBLIC TRANSPORT

Mr PAUL McLEAY: My question is addressed to the Premier. What action is the Government taking through the mini-budget to improve transport services and related matters?

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: The budget has met a serious challenge; that is, to meet real growth in demand for transport services and plan for the future in a growing State while bringing expenditure back into prudent limits. Plans for new growth into new areas were made when long-term demand was stable. However, the use of public transport is growing at record rates. Transport growth is now up to 5 per cent on routes where planners believed there was sufficient capacity for many years. The Government's plan is about reprioritising not only money but resources and expertise to ensure we deal first with the most pressing transport tasks.

The Government is putting in the necessary money to ensure our core transport system can cope with this unprecedented growth. We have bought record numbers of trains and buses, with more to come. And we are extending services, using bus priority, to get the best public transport value out of our road network. We will grow services where we must and we will expand services in the most affordable way. In many cases this will mean getting the best we can out of our buses before growth warrants new rail services. Sydney's transport plans assumed growth from 4.3 million people to 5.3 million by 2030. The Australian Bureau of Statistics now says that we will reach growth of 5.3 million by 2020—10 years earlier than predicted. So while our fundamental plans remain in place we have had to refocus on growth corridors and system capacity.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: The author of the transport policy that did not provide an additional bus or train! Central business district throughput determines the capacity of everybody's public transport. Extra trains from the west and south and extra buses from the north and north-west are constrained by the central business district, and that is why Town Hall and Wynyard are struggling. We can put more people on the \$3.6 billion worth of new trains we ordered—but half the tracks stop at Central Station. We need a new central business district underground rail corridor. To get more people onto public transport we need more trains and more buses.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: To get more people onto public transport we need more trains and more buses, and the mini-budget delivers \$370 million for additional outer suburban carriages, OSCars, and stabling yards to come into service from 2010; \$170 million over two years for an additional 300 buses to be rolled out from 2009; and \$115 million to fast-track the delivery of 150 articulated buses. We have re-engineered parts of the network under the Clearways Program so we can fit more trains on each line. The next step is to create a new service out of latent infrastructure at Central Station. Engineers at RailCorp and the Centre for Transport Planning tell me that the Sydney Terminal is underutilised, because most people want to go through Central Station not to it.

The tracks coming in to Central can handle more trains, but without good interchanging options crowds will clog up Town Hall and Wynyard and the trains will take so long to empty that fewer trains per hour will be able to get through those stations. That is why we need a new corridor under the city. That is what central business district metro is for. As the House would be aware, New South Wales has requested that the Commonwealth consider funding the project through Infrastructure Australia.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. Members will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: But the New South Wales Government is going ahead regardless of what the Commonwealth Government does. Today's mini-budget delivers \$1.8 billion towards the first stage of the Sydney Metro System, including the redevelopment of Central Station to allow for swift interchange between different modes of transport. The staging to Rozelle allows development of a bus interchange at White Bay, taking pressure of the Anzac Bridge and George Street and giving commuters faster access to the central business district. If Canberra wants to work with us so much the better—we can always do more together. But the Government commits today to this vital infrastructure. The north-west corridor will continue to be acquired for the future and from 2009 we will have an extra 100 buses on key routes to north-west Sydney.

[Interruption]

I have said previously that I thought that 2017 was an insult to the people of the north-west, and that is why we are delivering 100 extra buses from 2009.

Mr Chris Hartcher: No trains?

Mr NATHAN REES: I will come to the position of the member for Terrigal on trains, because he seems to have three of them. But that is a matter for another day. In addition, to support the growing demand for rail services the Government has allocated \$56 million for an additional 14 commuter car parks to be provided at train stations across suburban Sydney, the Central Coast, the Illawarra and the Blue Mountains, and \$56 million to deliver better front-line customer services for CityRail travellers. In view of the economic environment we are in, jobs are more important than ever. The OSCar carriages will be built in the Hunter while the new commuter car parks will stimulate construction work in local centres.

Growing proportionate to demand, but within our responsible financial limits, clearly requires some communities to wait for rail extensions. The staged delivery of the South West Rail Link will ensure we continue with the engineering and building that will get more people onto trains from the west on existing track. And we are continuing to buy the corridor so we can build the extension when the economy and public finances are able to support it. We have made sure lean management is pursued in transport to free up savings for services. The key reforms here will be in maintenance and cleaning services. These savings will be driven by better performance—not reductions in service.

Savings will include up to \$10 million saved through the benchmarking of maintenance services against the private sector, up to \$30 million saved by cutting out inefficiencies in cleaning services on the CityRail network, and up to \$20 million saved through cuts to RailCorp's back office administration. This package delivers real growth: more trains, more buses, and secures corridors for growth and a real capacity increase in the central business district to receive a greater numbers of trains and buses from the west and north-west and it provides the core central business district underground infrastructure for future metros.

Today's announcements are in sensible timeframes: one year for more buses, two years for more trains, and five years for more central business district capacity to support growth in all directions. In contrast we have the Leader of the Opposition's plans. He wants to replicate Transport for London. If he knew more about it he would know that Transport for London is based on bus contracting reform—which we have done. This is all about clear service contracts for river and rail—which I have done. The Leader of the Opposition has had 13 years to think about it but has given out so little detail that his colleagues, Opposition members, do not know if he has a policy. The member for Hawkesbury told the *Rouse Hills Times* on 5 November 2008:

It was now time for the Coalition to start planning for Sydney's transport needs if it takes power in March 2010.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: I will read that again, as I was rudely interrupted.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: After 13 years of his party being in opposition, the member for Hawkesbury told the *Rouse Hills Times*:

It was now time for the Coalition to start planning for Sydney's transport needs if it takes power in March 2010.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: No transport policy, no calendar.

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

[Interruption]

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting. The Premier will direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr NATHAN REES: Noted, Mr Speaker. New South Wales—like the rest of the country, indeed the rest of the world—is facing some tough times. The Government is cutting its costs and putting public money where it can do the greatest number of people the most good. We have made the hard choices to ensure we keep the State moving.

MINI-BUDGET FAMILY COSTS

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Premier. Given the Premier's mini-budget has left families with children hundreds of dollars worse off through cuts to the school transport scheme and the back-to-school allowance, and increases to the cost of child care, and as the Premier is half of a double-income couple with no children—hardly out of pocket—does he admit that he is out of touch with the people of New South Wales?

Mr NATHAN REES: I doorknocked 25,000 homes in the election campaign so I consider myself at least as in touch with the people of New South Wales as the member might be on the far north coast of New South Wales.

NEW SOUTH WALES ECONOMIC FUTURE

Mr MATTHEW MORRIS: My question is to the Deputy Premier. What action has the Government taken to secure an affordable future for New South Wales?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: There is no doubt, and it is recognised by this side of the House, that we are in uncertain economic times, probably the most uncertain since the Depression of the 1930s. It is one thing for the Opposition to claim that its members are in touch but there is no evidence of how members on that side of the House would meet the needs of New South Wales families in these tough economic times.

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

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The reality is in these tough economic times it is incumbent on a Government to show leadership and to demonstrate how we are going to protect the community from the worst excesses of the international financial crisis. If we are to do that we need to make hard decisions. We on this side of the House are capable of making hard decisions, but we see no evidence that those on the other side are capable of similarly hard decisions. No-one likes having to make hard decisions but the reality is that in the tough economic climate the needs of families in New South Wales demand it.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: We are making sure that we are taking responsible decisions to continue to see services delivered in New South Wales in an affordable and sustainable way. We have reaffirmed our commitment to the State's triple-A credit rating, again something that those on the other side of the House seem completely divided on.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: That's a lie.

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: The Leader of the Opposition says that that is a lie. The member for Oxley said the triple-A credit rating did not matter that much.

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

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: On ABC radio the member for Oxley said a triple-A credit rating is not the be-all and end-all. That was at 8.45 in the morning. I heard him myself.

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

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: By four o'clock in the afternoon the Leader of the Opposition recognised the folly of the member for Oxley's views and he quickly reaffirmed a different position when he said, "We are completely committed to the triple-A credit rating." In the morning it is not the be-all and end-all; in the afternoon the Opposition is completely committed to it. We on this side of the House understand the importance of making these tough decisions to protect our community from the ravages of the international financial crisis. Today the Government has met the challenge of securing New South Wales' financial position but at the same time we have reaffirmed our commitment to maintaining front-line public services in our hospitals, schools and emergency services. We are committed to investing in vital health infrastructure. The Government remains committed to meeting existing time frames in major projects that are already in progress, including Liverpool Hospital, the new Royal North Shore Hospital, Orange Base Hospital, and the Mater in Newcastle.

In education, once again, we understand the need to try in these tough times to do what we can to direct more resources to education and that is why more resources are going to disadvantaged schools and the students they serve. Eighty new full-time special education teachers will be funded. There will also be an extra \$150 million worth of building and improvement projects at public schools across New South Wales—not glamorous, but fixing the leaky roofs, upgrading the school toilets and putting security fences in place. Front-line police have been quarantined from savings measures and children in care will receive greater resources. In framing this mini-budget the Government has been very conscious of the importance of New South Wales to the Australian economy. We will continue to maintain the biggest public infrastructure investment program in New South Wales. I will also talk about the environment because as I have said on many occasions—

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

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: —we understand the critical importance of climate change and the need to deliver when it comes to protecting our environment and combating climate change. The Rees Government is committed to what is now more than ever a top priority for New South Wales. That is why we will continue to fund the State's largest environment programs, the City and Country Environmental Restoration Program and the Climate Change Fund. The City and Country Environmental Restoration Program has already delivered new marine parks, expanded council-based services, a stronger Environmental Trust grants scheme and \$105 million to buy back water for the environment. The program, which has been the cornerstone of environmental protection in this State, will be extended for another five years beginning in 2011-12.

The Government will continue to use the successful waste levy to fund this program and also to drive greater waste avoidance and reduce disposal to landfill through a \$10 per tonne per year increase in the levy in the greater Sydney region. The levy will also be phased in to drive recycling on the North Coast and in the Blue Mountains and Wollondilly areas. The waste levy is the Government's most effective tool in driving waste avoidance and resource recovery in New South Wales. It works by increasing the cost of waste disposal to landfill, and stimulating investment in resource recovery businesses and new technology and infrastructure. We know that the levy has already helped to drive innovation in greener waste technology.

The levy has put New South Wales at the top of the recycling ladder with six advanced waste treatment facilities in operation and seven more in the pipeline. Increasing and expanding the levy will help improve landfill performance, stimulate greater resource recovery and provide funding for the State's longer-term environmental priorities. This Government has acted responsibly across the board to secure the future of New South Wales families. We understand that we need to make tough decisions but we also understand that we need to do that in a way that protects front-line services and makes sure that those services that families in New South Wales are reliant upon continue to deliver. We can show that leadership on this side of the House. It is sorely lacking from those opposite.

MINI-BUDGET FORECAST

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question is directed to the Premier. Why should people believe that the Premier has taken "the difficult decisions and tough choices" when his own mini-budget reveals expenses growth is forecast to increase?

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will remain silent. The member for Wakehurst will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: The mini-budget is delivering more buses; a mini-budget that is delivering more trains; a mini-budget that has protected the health budget; a mini-budget that delivers 80 new special needs teachers; a mini-budget that delivers \$150 million to put in security fences around schools, refurbish and improve toilet facilities in schools and repair roofs in schools across the State; a mini-budget that maintains \$50 billion of infrastructure spending over four years; and a mini-budget that shares the burden equitably, including among parliamentarians. We have met the challenge; we have submitted our exam. The challenge for the Leader of the Opposition is to outline—

[Interruption]

He gets to respond tomorrow. The challenge for the Leader of the Opposition is to outline how he would deal with these international circumstances and these difficult times, because while we are committed to a triple-A rating the Leader of the Opposition has failed to outline any alternative plan—

The SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation.

Mr NATHAN REES: I know what the alternative plan is—the rural Liberals. I know what the alternative plan is and the member is history once that gets a run on. Under the Opposition's alternate plan we would be talking about a triple-C rating.

SCHOOLS IN NEED

Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN: My question is addressed to the Minister for Education and Training. Will the Minister update the House on what action the Government is taking to support schools in need?

Ms VERITY FIRTH: I thank the member for Camden for hosting me when I was looking at schools in his electorate last week and I also thank him for his advocacy on behalf of schools in his local area. When we started this mini-budget process we said that we would be prioritising our spending in core State government responsibilities. We have to ensure that our resources are going to the right places and that they are reaching people who need them most. That is why we have taken the tough decisions to end the back-to-school allowance and redirect the \$20 million per annum saved from that program into programs to help needy schools and students with learning needs. The Government is strongly committed to ensuring that every student enrolled in our public schools is provided with a quality education.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the Leader of The Nationals to order for the second time. I ask him to allow the Minister to be heard in silence.

Ms VERITY FIRTH: If I were the Leader of The Nationals I would not interrupt too much because the Opposition's position on the back-to-school allowance is all over the place. Let us return to the familiar theme about Government members being prepared to make the tough decisions and Opposition members being completely all over the place and not knowing where they are heading. Let us talk about the back-to-school allowance. The State Opposition said, "We do not want you to get rid of the back-to-school allowance but we also will not commit to reintroducing it. We do not know what we want to do with the back-to-school allowance." That is the Opposition's position. Alternatively, Government members decided to put this money into needy schools and into special education teachers. More than 33,000 children in our public schools have a confirmed disability and around 56,000 have difficulties in basic areas of learning.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will cease interjecting.

Ms VERITY FIRTH: The number of students who have complex additional learning needs is increasing. In particular I am talking about students with dyslexia, autism, language delays, behavioural disorders and mental health issues. Kids with complex additional learning needs are in many classes from kindergarten to year 12.

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

Ms VERITY FIRTH: As a result, school principals and teachers are seeking additional specialist help from outside their schools to meet the learning needs of every student. As I have already outlined, we will be

spending around \$9 million extra per annum so that we can fund the equivalent of 80 new full-time specialist teacher positions in 265 schools across the State, including Blairmount Public School and Sarah Redfern Public School in south-western Sydney, The Entrance Public School on the Central Coast, St Marys North Public School in western Sydney, and Warrawong High School in the Illawarra. These specialist teachers will work alongside classroom teachers and provide expert assistance to students with a disability or learning difficulties.

This additional support will be a much-needed boost for teachers who are trying to balance the needs of their entire class. These teachers will also be able to help coordinate services from other agencies such as physiotherapy, speech therapy, psychology and social work. These specialist teachers are in addition to other specialists already available in our schools, including reading recovery teachers. We are also addressing disadvantaged schools because we want to boost funding to our most needy schools as part of our Priority Action Schools Program. Additional funding of \$6.7 million will also help us to deliver much-needed resources on the ground for 27 additional schools to come onto the Priority Action Schools Program in some of the most disadvantaged communities in the State.

These schools include Claymore Public School and Canley Vale High School in south-west Sydney, Braddock Public School in western Sydney, Raymond Terrace Public School in the Hunter, Koonawarra Public School in the Illawarra, and Coffs Harbour Public School on the North Coast. These schools support needy communities and the schools use this funding to provide programs such as intensive literacy and numeracy support for kindergarten teachers. As I said earlier, we know that the drought is badly hitting many of our rural communities.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber.

Ms VERITY FIRTH: We are also seeing an increased need to provide more support for our State's disadvantaged rural communities, as was shown in our recent round of priority action.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Lismore will contain himself.

Ms VERITY FIRTH: The mini-budget also boosts the Student Assistance Scheme by \$900,000, which is important because that scheme provides funding for things such as textbooks, uniforms and excursions for students who cannot afford such things. Principals use those funds to run that scheme. We are also delivering an additional \$4 million to non-government schools to provide extra assistance for special education services. The Government wants to tackle this problem head on by directing the State's resources to the people who need them most. This Government is committed to ensuring that students in some of our most needy schools have all the assistance that they can get to make their way in the world with the benefit of a strong public education.

PETROL SUBSIDY ABOLITION

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Premier. Does he accept that today's decision to abolish the northern New South Wales fuel subsidy scheme will force more New South Wales businesses, such as transport operators, to relocate to Queensland in order to retain their competitive advantage and hurt northern New South Wales families already struggling with the cost of living?

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals has asked his question.

Mr NATHAN REES: It was a difficult budget and we made difficult decisions for difficult times. That was the challenge and that is the challenge we have met.

MINI-BUDGET: RURAL AND REGIONAL COMMUNITIES

Mr STEVE WHAN: My question is addressed to the Premier. What action has the Government taken to support rural and regional communities and economies, and related matters?

Mr NATHAN REES: I thank the member for his hard work in supporting country communities all over New South Wales. The member for Monaro and the Country Labor team are true representatives of country communities and they are strong advocates for the hardworking families and businesses in country New South Wales.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting, including the member for Terrigal. I call the member for Terrigal to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: I recognise the hard work that they do for families and businesses in rural and regional areas. Like me, Country Labor knows that country towns have been doing it tough. The drought, climate change and economic turmoil are putting families and small businesses in country towns under extreme pressure. My Government understands the challenges facing country communities and it is here to help. That is why today, as part of the mini-budget, I am pleased to reaffirm my Government's ongoing commitment to supporting the bush.

The \$85 million Building the Country package is aimed squarely at giving a boost to those communities that are most in need. Over the next five years that \$85 million of new money will be spread across seven new programs—tailored programs that will build on the strong sense of pride and community that exists in our rural towns, whilst encouraging growth and job opportunities through business investment. People from the country do not come to the Government cap in hand looking for a handout, but that is no reason to ignore the challenges that exist in the bush. That is why a cornerstone of the Building the Country package is a \$52 million local infrastructure fund. That money will be dedicated—

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: That money will be dedicated to building small projects such as bridges, roads and gas pipes that will be used by businesses expanding or getting started in country towns—investment that will create new jobs and deliver prosperity. Building the Country also targets funds to upgrade community halls and libraries—the hubs and hearts of our small towns. Over the next five years we will also spend \$11.6 million on high-speed broadband services to fill the gaps not covered by the national broadband network.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: This initiative will give remote communities access to services that are often taken for granted by people in the city and by large regional centres. The Government will also support towns affected by water reforms to use their expertise in developing water-saving technologies and services. Building the Country, a specialised package, complements existing programs and creates a bigger toolbox that we can use to expand businesses in rural areas in New South Wales—a targeted investment that will spark country communities, create jobs and get country New South Wales back on track.

Our funding package has received a warm welcome from councils and the broader community alike. We have received support from every corner of country New South Wales. In fact, the member for Murrumbidgee would be interested to hear that we received a letter from one of his local mayors. Mr Lindsay Renwick, the Mayor of Deniliquin, wrote to us and said:

The funding made available under the announced programs will be a shot in the arm for many struggling communities.

I feel that in the tough economic climate this initiative is one that will be greatly appreciated in rural NSW.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting, including the member for Coffs Harbour and the member for Bathurst.

Mr NATHAN REES: We received another letter from Lynda Summers, Chair of the New South Wales Regional Communities Consultative Council.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: Ms Summers said:

In many small communities it is often the little things that don't make the headlines, like community halls, up to date library books, and decent broadband which make a community a better place to live.

The council knows that regional and rural areas are a key productivity sector of our state and it is great to see their role recognised by your Government with this commitment to infrastructure ... especially when times are tough.

All of these measures, which I stress are just the beginning, are a response in part to the report of the recent Rural and Regional Taskforce, an initiative championed by my Country Labor colleague the member for Monaro and none other than the honourable Speaker of the House. Country towns are a great place to live and a fantastic place to hold conferences. Just two weeks ago I outlined these initiatives in Port Macquarie at Country Labor's conference.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: The new member for Port Macquarie and I opened the new hospital emergency department. We outlined these initiatives at Port Macquarie and, like all good advocates of country people, Country Labor's conference is always held outside Sydney. Perhaps The Nationals should take a leaf out of this book.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: The Nationals held its conference just over the harbour in the leafy and exclusive suburb of Kirribilli. If ever there were a slap in the face to rural and regional people, it was evident in the choice of venue by The Nationals of New South Wales. No doubt it was more convenient for the leadership team of the New South Wales Nationals to host its country conference close to their local investment properties. The pecuniary interests register shows that the New South Wales Nationals leadership team owns some of Sydney's prime real estate. Kirribilli would be the logical choice of venue if you were the Leader of The Nationals, who is only 10 minutes away from his Park Street, Sydney, high-rise location. Kirribilli would be the logical choice of venue for the member for Ballina, who has an apartment in Victoria Towers in Castlereagh Street. Kirribilli would be the logical choice of venue for the member for Murrumbidgee, who has a 15-minute drive from his investment property at Coogee. Kirribilli would be the logical choice of venue for the member for Lismore, who has a residential unit in Bridge Street, Sydney.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr Russell Turner: Do you want us to sleep on the park benches, mate?

Mr NATHAN REES: You are a long way from a park bench.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Myall Lakes will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: Kirribilli would be the logical choice of venue for the member for Upper Hunter, who has a number of properties to choose from, including Darling Point, Surry Hills and Artarmon—harbour views, city views and more harbour views! The only place The Nationals feel comfortable holding its conference is on the North Shore of Sydney—and they called me out of touch! The best kind of defence is offence: The member for Willoughby and the member for North Shore had better watch their backs because the Leader of The Nationals is eyeing off their seats from his Park Street penthouse. No wonder the Liberals supported the independent candidate for Port Macquarie.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order—

Mr NATHAN REES: I struck a nerve.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the Minister for Transport to order.

Mr Andrew Stoner: I have been reluctant to take a point of order because this has been so entertaining.

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

Mr Andrew Stoner: My point of order is in relation to "related matters", to which you give some latitude. The question was about the mini-budget in rural and regional New South Wales, in which I know you are very interested. The property holdings of various members do not fall within "related matters".

The SPEAKER: Order! I have heard enough on the point of order. I ask the Premier to return to the leave of the question.

Mr NATHAN REES: Kirribilli was rural at some stage, I am sure! It is no wonder that Liberals supported the Independent candidate for Port Macquarie. No wonder the Country Liberals are starting their push in regional New South Wales. I will share with the House the details of an invitation that came my way recently. This Saturday the Country Liberals will meet for their conference in Wagga Wagga. Unlike their Coalition cousins, the Country Liberals are meeting in the country! That is good. The guest speaker is Barry O'Farrell.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order. As much as I would like to hear this, clearly the Premier is canvassing your ruling.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will listen further to the Premier.

Mr NATHAN REES: The theme of the Liberals conference in Wagga Wagga is "Carbon Trading—threat or opportunity for regional Australia." On one side the Leader of The Nationals says it is a threat, on the other side the Liberal member for Goulburn says it is an opportunity. Now in the middle the Country Liberals are debating their position. The Opposition should get back to us once it has a unified view on the subject. In the meantime, the Government will keep going getting things done in the bush and acting on the issues that matter to our rural constituencies.

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

FIRST HOME BUYERS

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: My question is directed to the Premier. As his massive infrastructure charges and levies of up to \$150,000 per block of land have now produced the lowest rate of land releases since the 1950s—

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

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: —why does he not scrap his time-wasting review that was announced today and get on with a red hot go at dumping the charges that have killed the New South Wales market for first home purchasers?

Mr NATHAN REES: The State Government has a number of levers to influence the supply of affordable housing. First, through rezoning sufficient supplies of land to allow multiple development fronts to keep downward pressure on housing prices; second, by ensuring that development contributions for infrastructure are reasonable, affordable and reduce the cost of bringing new land to market—that is why the Treasurer announced this morning a review of some of those fees; and, third, by making the planning system as efficient and effective as possible, we will avoid blowouts in development assessment times and, therefore, the cost of development. The Government has taken action on all these issues, particularly the operation of development contribution levies, to make sure that it can facilitate affordable housing. In addition, we announced an additional \$3,000 for first home buyers who are buying newly constructed premises. For a home worth \$500,000, the assistance to new homebuyers provided through a combination of New South Wales and Federal Government grants is in the order of \$42,000.

ENERGY SUPPLY SECURITY

Ms CHERIE BURTON: My question is addressed to the Minister for Finance. Will the Minister update the House on what action the Government is taking to secure the State's energy supplies and related matters?

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI: The reform package announced by the Premier on 1 November represents the most significant microeconomic reform this State has seen for more than a decade. It will transform the electricity market in New South Wales and bring a significant flow of investment into the State.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting. Question time has almost concluded. All members who have been called to order are now deemed to be on three calls to order. Question time will be conducted in accordance with the proper conventions of the House.

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI: This reform will be delivered by the Rees Labor Government. That is not unusual. Under Labor the electricity market in New South Wales has undergone major phase reform. These reforms paved the way for the Premier's current package and include a disaggregation of Pacific Power in 1995; the establishment of the interim wholesale market in 1996; the first component to what is now known as the national electricity market, which commenced in 1998 between New South Wales and Victoria; and New South Wales being the first State to allow full retail contestability in 2002. Unlike the parochial Opposition, we are

aware of national and international pressures such as the rapidly developing emerging economies, pressing global challenges and competition for scarce energy resources. Government energy policies the world over will reshape economic structures and transform our way of life.

Security and reliability of energy is vital to our economy and that is why the importance of these reforms cannot be overstated. The Government's reform package involves the sale of the Government's generation development sites, withdrawal of government from the electricity retail market and lease of the State-owned generators trading rights known as the generation trader. This means generators remain in government ownership. Their operation, maintenance and management will continue to be undertaken by public sector employees. The new element of the package is the trader model where the operation and trading activities of the State-owned generators, Macquarie Generation, Delta Electricity and Eraring Electricity, are separated.

Electricity trading in the national electricity market is risky and volatile. Prices can vary from minus \$1,000 to positive \$10,000 per megawatt hour within minutes. Under the Premier's plan for energy reform, the financial risks of trading electricity into the national electricity market [NEM] will be leased to the private sector for a fee. This means the financial risks of trading in electricity will be removed from the taxpayer. The Government will earn a fixed and steady revenue for operating and maintaining the power stations and will not be vulnerable to trading losses. The community, the Labor Party and the Parliament have spoken on this issue. We have listened and developed this reform agenda. We have a clear plan going forward that has been welcomed by the business community. But, of course, where is Barry's plan for energy supplies in New South Wales? We have no idea where the Opposition stands when it comes to an energy plan for the State—and neither does it.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is still too much audible conversation in the Chamber. The member for Epping will cease interjecting.

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI: The Government's reform package will encourage private sector investment and secure supply. Both the Owen inquiry and the National Electricity Market Management Company [NEMMCO] agreed that New South Wales needs new generation capacity to be built within the next decade. Professor Owen estimated that the total cost of new electricity investment needed in New South Wales is \$12 billion to \$15 billion over the next 10 to 15 years, if the Government continues to own its retailers and generators. The most efficient way of achieving additional generation is by opening the market to competition and encouraging private investment.

The leasing of the rights to trade generation output, in conjunction with the sale of retailers and generation development sites, sends a very clear and credible message to the private sector that this Government is doing everything it can to strengthen the environment for private sector investment in power generation. Reducing the public sector's involvement in electricity trading, both wholesale and retail, will encourage private investment. Retailers will have opportunities to build new generation to manage wholesale market risks as customers demand it. Private investors in generation also will have opportunities to diversify their generation capacity without concern that their investments will be threatened by government competition.

The Government is confident that this package will result in increased private sector investment, particularly for peak generation and the first tranche of baseload generation. This confidence is well founded as various forms of the trader model operate successfully elsewhere in the world and also in the national electricity market. The model has been used by a wide range of energy companies as a means of improving efficiency, maximising returns and encouraging private investment. Of course, in contrast to the comment of the member for Manly that, "... we are yet to see any external endorsement of the deal", industry response to the reform package has been extremely supportive. I will inform the House of some of the endorsements.

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

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI: The Opposition will not do anything without being guided by the media. AGL has stated on the record:

[It] supports the view that new private sector investment in generation in particular will be encouraged if government is no longer a significant participant in the wholesale electricity market.

That is consistent with the New South Wales Government's policy.

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

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI: AGL also states:

... the proposed Trader Model could help to achieve this outcome and AGL notes that this model is already in use both within Australia and in overseas markets.

There is further support from the New South Wales Business Chamber:

The expansion of the electricity sector should be left in the hands of the private sector, while the government focuses on delivering priority infrastructure to the community.

TRUenergy also supports the proposal and stated that it is "ready to invest in New South Wales energy assets".

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

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI: The Civil Contractors Federation also supports the plan and stated:

The Government should be commended for taking these steps and recognizing the opportunity costs of maintaining such a capital-intensive industry.

Another key objective of the reform package in today's mini-budget is to maintain the State's triple-A credit rating. It is well known that, following the Opposition's action to scuttle the previous reform package, the ratings agencies were concerned that the State's balance sheet could not support further increases in capital spending, whether to fund additional generation of power or to meet other infrastructure commitments and programs. This package seeks to ensure that New South Wales's credit rating is maintained in a number of ways. By owning retailers and generators, the Government is shareholder, and ultimately the New South Wales taxpayer is exposed to the volatility of wholesale electricity prices. This package will largely remove the risk to the State from wholesale electricity trading and instead will provide a reliable return from State-owned generators.

The sale of State-owned retailers removes the need for the Government to fund the cost of maintaining the competitiveness of the retail businesses, and that will generate a saving of \$2 billion to \$3 billion. Where private investment in new generation occurs, it will reduce or defer the need for public investment in a capital-intensive industry. When the elements of the reform package are aggregated, such as the reduction in financial risks associated with generation and ownership, removing barriers of entry for private investment, reducing capital expenditure and maximising the sale proceeds, we take ample strides towards securing the State's triple-A credit rating. On the key issue of the State's triple-A credit rating, which is one of the most important issues facing New South Wales, we have seen nothing but a split in the Coalition, as the Deputy Premier pointed out earlier. The Leader of The Nationals, Andrew Stoner, is on the record as saying, "A triple-A credit rating is not the be-all and end-all."

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order.

Mr JOSEPH TRIPODI: The Opposition is happy to allow the triple-A credit rating to be put at risk, for us to move away from a triple-A credit rating and for us to be liable to pay approximately \$100 million a year more in interest payments within four years.

Question time concluded.

VARIATIONS OF PAYMENTS ESTIMATES AND APPROPRIATIONS 2008-09

Mr Joseph Tripodi tabled, pursuant to section 24 of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, variations of the payments estimates and appropriations for 2008-09 relating to various agencies, which replaces determination previously tabled on 21 October 2008.

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT

The Clerk announced the receipt, pursuant to section 63C of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, of the following reports, received out of session and authorised to be printed:

Auditor-General's Report—Financial Audits—Volume Three 2008, dated 31 October 2008.

Auditor-General's Report—Financial Audits—Volume Four 2008, dated 5 November 2008.

Report on State Finances 2007-2008, dated 31 October 2008.

LEGISLATION REVIEW COMMITTEE**Report**

The Clerk announced receipt, in accordance with section 10 of the Legislation Review Act 1987, of the report of the Legislation Review Committee entitled, "Legislation Review Digest No. 13 of 2008", dated 10 November 2008.

PUBLIC ACCOUNTS COMMITTEE**Report**

Mr Paul McLeay, as Chair, tabled the report entitled, "Report on Examination of the Auditor-General's Performance Audits Tabled July 2006 to March 2007—Condition of State Roads; Educating Primary School Students with Disabilities; Major Infectious Disease Outbreaks: Readiness to Respond; Helping Older People Access a Residential Aged Care Facility; Attracting, Retaining and Managing Nurses in Hospitals; Distributing Legal Aid in New South Wales; Addressing the Needs of Young Offenders", dated November 2008.

Ordered to be printed on motion by Mr Paul McLeay.

PETITIONS**Hornsby Area Haemodialysis**

Petition asking that a public haemodialysis centre be established in the Hornsby area, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Ambulance Rescue Function

Petition opposing the recommendation of the Head Report to disband the rescue function within the Ambulance Service of New South Wales, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Tumut Renal Dialysis Service

Petition asking that the House support the establishment of a satellite renal dialysis service in Tumut, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai Palliative Care Beds

Petition requesting maintenance of funding for palliative care beds in the Hornsby and Ku-ring-gai area, received from **Mr Barry O'Farrell**.

Royal North Shore Hospital Hydrotherapy Pool

Petition requesting that the hydrotherapy pool remain open at Royal North Shore Hospital and that a hydrotherapy pool be included in the redevelopment plans for the hospital, received from **Mr Barry O'Farrell**.

Tathra Wharf

Petition requesting funding to improve access and facilities to the Tathra Wharf Ring Road and promote the wharf as a tourist attraction, received from **Mr Andrew Constance**.

South Coast Rail Services

Petition opposing any reduction in rail services on the South Coast line, received from **Mrs Shelley Hancock**.

Hawkesbury River Railway Station Access

Petition requesting improved access to Hawkesbury River railway station, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Bus Service 311

Petition requesting improved services on bus route 311, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Edgecliff Interchange Upgrade

Petition requesting the upgrading of Edgecliff interchange, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Bus Service 590

Petition requesting continuation of bus route 590 from Turramurra to Chatswood, received from **Mr Barry O'Farrell**.

Barangaroo Planning Guidelines

Petition opposing the Sydney Harbour Foreshore Authority proposal to modify Barangaroo planning guidelines, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Star City Casino Proposal

Petition opposing the Sydney Harbour Casino Properties proposal for the Star City Casino, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Pet Shops

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

Albury Policing

Petition requesting additional beat police in the Albury electorate, received from **Mr Greg Aplin**.

Preschool Speed Zones

Petition asking that 40 kilometre per hour speed zones be introduced outside all preschools in New South Wales, received from **Mr Donald Page**.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Business Lapsed**

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) Nos 1 to 5 lapsed pursuant to Standing Order 105 (3).

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders: Mini-budget**

Motion, by leave, by Mr John Aquilina agreed to:

That on Wednesday 12 November 2008 standing and sessional orders be suspended to interrupt the business before the House at 12.00 p.m. to permit the Leader of the Opposition to reply to the mini-budget address by the Treasurer for 30 minutes.

LEGISLATION REVIEW COMMITTEE**Membership**

Mr SPEAKER: I report the receipt of the following message from the Legislative Council:

Mr SPEAKER

The Legislative Council desires to inform the Legislative Assembly that, under section 6 (2) of the Legislation Review Act 1987, Ms Hale has been appointed as a member on the Legislation Review Committee in place of Mr Smith.

Legislative Council
11 November 2008

PETER PRIMROSE
President

CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY**Mini-budget**

Mr FRANK TERENCE (Maitland) [3.23 p.m.]: This motion deserves priority because of the urgency of the matter. One cannot turn anywhere without hearing about the deteriorating stock market, decreasing house prices and the general fear and anxiety among people in the community about what will happen in economic terms. That is why the Treasurer handed down the important mini-budget today. The motion deserves priority for an important reason: The people of New South Wales need to know the difference between what Labor members are doing and Coalition members are not doing.

This important debate will focus on that. The people of New South Wales want to know what community leaders are doing about this financial crisis—what the Government is doing and what the Coalition is not doing. Members opposite take every opportunity to whinge and carp; that is all they do. I will be interested to hear what they say, instead of the usual whingeing, carping and whining. This debate will be an opportunity for members opposite to put forward proposals to deal with the economic crisis. For those reasons, the motion is important and should be debated in this House.

New South Wales Economy

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [3.24 p.m.]: My motion should be supported—and I expect the member for Maitland to support it—because the difference between members on this side of the House and members opposite is that we will tell the truth, not continue the lies.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Monaro will cease interjecting.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: The member for Maitland needs to support my motion because his motion is redundant, given that he is clearly redundant because he has not seen our "Planning for Prosperity" policy document. This Labor Government is so incompetent that it has delivered a slash-and-burn budget that still increases expenses growth in New South Wales. What does that mean? The 13-year-old problem of this State Government has been its failure to live within its means. Not once in 13 State budgets has Labor brought in a budget on budget. As a result, \$17.5 billion of revenue—revenue that could and should have been used to invest in infrastructure, roads, rail and the like and to reduce taxes to ensure that we are an attractive investment State—was wasted. It was splashed up against a wall by a State Labor Party that simply made short-sighted decision after short-sighted decision for no goal or purpose other than to win the next State election campaign.

Today that has been underlined and reinforced by a State mini-budget that slugs families—Labor's so-called working families—at a time when they can least afford it. It fails to deliver any long-term solutions to the financial problems of New South Wales. Finally, it fails to offer a single thing that will attract business to New South Wales. New South Wales is no longer the destination of opportunity; it is now the transit lane for those people wanting opportunities in Queensland and Victoria. Today's mini-budget makes New South Wales less attractive for people wanting to do business here. The only benefit of this budget is the third reannouncement of payroll tax reductions that in the end will deliver a payroll tax rate that is still higher than that in Queensland and a threshold that is still lower than that in Queensland. Nothing in today's budget does anything about setting the parameters, the framework, the future as to why we are on about this. The member for Maitland should look at our "Planning for Prosperity" document.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Monaro and the member for Maitland will cease interjecting.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: The member for Maitland should look at that document and compare it to elements of the Treasurer's mini-budget today, where he picks up three of our four fiscal commitments. The Premier does not understand that there is no point in having a fiscal strategy if they do not know where they want to take the State. The Treasurer failed to do that today. We have set out four fiscal strategies but we have also set four goals for the State. We are determined to ensure that New South Wales is again leading as a sustainable economic growth centre in this nation. We are determined to ensure that New South Wales is for the first time a twenty-first century State. We are determined to ensure that New South Wales is the first place in which people and businesses will want to do business.

We are absolutely committed, as Liberals and Nationals representing rural, regional and urban areas, to ensuring that regional New South Wales is a place of equal opportunity. All of that is the whole reason that one

runs a State's budget. The fact that after 13½ years the State Government does not have a plan or a vision for the State is demonstrated again because 13 budgets have come and gone. Thirteen sets of promises to deliver so-called record investments in infrastructure have come and gone. Thirteen lots of commitments to ensure that budget discipline was maintained have come and gone. And the people of this State have nothing to show for it. The biggest lie—the lie delivered by the Treasurer today; the lie delivered by every Minister who spoke in question time today—is that the mini-budget was caused by the international economic situation.

Michael Costa gave the lie to that and blew the whistle. He made the point that New South Wales was experiencing its current problems because the State Government had failed to address the fundamental economic issues over the preceding decade. We are in this mess because of the Government's mismanagement, and nothing in today's mini-budget provides anyone with any hope—more promises, promises that in the past have been dashed; and more commitment to delivering infrastructure, which in the past has not materialised. This Government is out of time and out of ideas: it ought to be out of office. We have just seen an election in the United States of America that has been all about "Yes, we can". This is a "No, we can't" Government. The people understand it, and it offers no-one any comfort.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 48

Ms Andrews	Mr Gibson	Ms Megarrity
Mr Aquilina	Mr Greene	Mr Morris
Ms Beamer	Mr Harris	Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Borger	Ms Hay	Mr Pearce
Mr Brown	Mr Hickey	Mrs Perry
Ms Burney	Ms Hornery	Mr Sartor
Ms Burton	Ms Judge	Mr Shearan
Mr Campbell	Ms Keneally	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Collier	Mr Khoshaba	Mr Terenzini
Mr Coombs	Mr Koperberg	Mr Tripodi
Mr Corrigan	Mr Lalich	Mr West
Mr Costa	Mr Lynch	Mr Whan
Mr Daley	Mr McBride	
Ms D'Amore	Dr McDonald	
Ms Firth	Ms McKay	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Furolo	Mr McLeay	Mr Ashton
Ms Gadiel	Ms McMahan	Mr Martin

Noes, 41

Mr Aplin	Mr Hartcher	Mr Richardson
Mr Baird	Mr Hazzard	Mr Roberts
Mr Baumann	Ms Hodgkinson	Mrs Skinner
Ms Berejikian	Mrs Hopwood	Mr Smith
Mr Besseling	Mr Humphries	Mr Souris
Mr Cansdell	Mr Kerr	Mr Stokes
Mr Constance	Mr Merton	Mr Stoner
Mr Debnam	Ms Moore	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Dominello	Mr O'Dea	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Draper	Mr O'Farrell	Mr J. D. Williams
Mrs Fardell	Mr Page	Mr R. C. Williams
Mr Fraser	Mr Piccoli	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Goward	Mr Piper	Mr George
Mrs Hancock	Mr Provost	Mr Maguire

Question resolved in the affirmative.

MINI-BUDGET**Motion Accorded Priority**

Mr FRANK TERENCE (Maitland) [3.37 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that there is currently a global economic crisis;
- (2) congratulates the Government for its efforts to secure an affordable future for New South Wales; and
- (3) expresses disappointment in the Opposition for failing the families of New South Wales in having no policies to secure the State's economy and triple-A credit rating.

Families across New South Wales are really starting to feel the hardship of the global financial crisis. The mini-budget is about making sure that we take that into account as a future driver of government policies. The Government has had to make some very tough decisions. It has had to be inventive, decisive and measured with the State's finances to secure our triple-A credit rating, and it has done that. It is a shame that the Opposition has offered nothing—no policy, no reform and no leadership—during one of the most challenging economic times for the world. We are moving into the most uncertain time since the 1930s, yet the Opposition has not done one thing or put out a single policy in these difficult times.

The Government is committed to securing an affordable future for New South Wales, and today it has delivered. We have volatile stock markets, rising petrol prices and increased pressure as a result of the international fallout. The economic climate calls for a strong policy and strong leadership. Today the Treasurer delivered a mini-budget that will support the Government's triple-A credit rating and secure the economic future of New South Wales. The package will protect and service the people of New South Wales. The Government announced savings totalling \$3.3 billion over the next four years and measures to raise \$3.6 billion, and confirmed that business tax cuts to the value of \$1.9 billion would remain. Also announced was a targeted expenditure of \$850 million.

I am sure that the people of New South Wales would want to know exactly what the Opposition is doing in these tough economic times. I can answer that with two words: absolutely nothing. Through the Government's detailed assessment and rigorous planning we have been able to protect our triple-A credit rating, which says to the rest of the world that it is sound to invest in New South Wales; it is a credit rating that allows us to invest responsibly, which is imperative, but it is something that the Opposition refuses to acknowledge. I will inform the House what would happen if the Government failed to act now to secure the triple-A credit rating. If the Opposition had its way and the triple-A rating were lost, the cost of government would blow out by 20 to 25 basis points.

To put that simply, \$100 million per year would be gone and the State's finances would be in a perilous state. That is equivalent to 200 buses, 1,000 additional classroom teachers and 30 new air-conditioned train carriages—all would be lost. The Opposition would have buses and trains taken away, but today we have delivered them. The Treasurer announced that we have budgeted \$370 million dollars to provide new outer-suburban rail carriages in addition to the 121 carriages already purchased. The Treasurer announced also the provision of \$170 million to buy an extra 300 new buses. He announced also that the purchase of 150 new bendy buses worth \$115 million would be brought forward. All of that was possible because of the Government's disciplined, measured and decisive management of the State's budget in an economically responsible way.

One of the great announcements in today's mini-budget was the reaffirmation of the allocation of \$56.8 billion towards infrastructure projects over the next four years and the development of a public transport scheme to improve services and get more cars off our roads. We not only face hard economic times but we make the tough decisions, which enables us to embark on the greatest infrastructure spending program in recent times. The Premier has said on many occasions that we all need to tighten our belts. We have targeted bureaucratic waste and inefficiency and we have reduced the size of the senior executive service by 20 per cent, saving \$120 million over four years.

The Treasurer announced also an air-travel policy requiring members of Parliament and public servants to take the cheapest available fares. We have also cut passes for free public transport for members of Parliament,

which sends a clear message about how we feel on this very important issue. Our community pays for public transport, and so should we. That cut sends a clear message to the people of New South Wales that we are in this together—and that is important because we should all share the pain of this economic crisis.

The Opposition has said nothing to the New South Wales public about what it would do in this economic crisis. I very much look forward to the Opposition's contribution to this debate and hearing its proposals. I may be surprised, and I wait in anticipation as I do every time members opposite speak. I wait to hear about the Opposition's policies and concrete ideas, but, of course, if I am disappointed I will not be surprised. The member for Manly looks very keen to speak: it is obvious that he likes sitting on the frontbench. He can sense something in the wind. But there is a fraction too much friction in the Coalition today: the Coalition of the unwilling. The member for Manly will take the opportunity to score a few points, followed by the member for Pittwater. If they were not so busy worrying about their internal problems they might come up with a few policies. The member for Hawkesbury wants to have a go. I look forward to hearing what he has to offer.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! The House will come to order.

Mr FRANK TERENCE: The member for Manly is looking at his notes. I wait with great anticipation to hear what he will offer today.

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly) [3.44 p.m.]: I move:

That the motion be amended by leaving out paragraphs (2) and (3) with a view to inserting instead:

(2) condemns the Government for its failure to secure an affordable future for New South Wales.

We have all heard about the economic crisis. I am glad that the first paragraph of the motion notes that there is currently a global economic crisis. It gives me great hope that someone on the other side of the House obviously has read a newspaper in the past 12 months. I did not think that that would happen, but someone has picked up a newspaper and learned something about what is going on in the world—he is not sure what it is—but it involves a "crisis" in the economy, and he acknowledges that that is really bad. Then, suddenly the spin doctors have said to wait, there might be an opportunity to turn the global economic crisis that he read about in the newspaper, and which sounds so bad, into an opportunity to get rid of all the bad news in New South Wales, and blame someone else.

It is a classic Australian Labor Party move in this State. It is textbook. I congratulate the State Labor Party on its success in trying to blame someone else for its problems. The truth is that this crisis has been a long time coming. It is not only me who says that, but also a list of people. We need to talk about who says that. The Government commissioned a report by Vertigan and Stokes to look into the State's finances, as not everything was going well. In 2006 Premier Morris Iemma commissioned Vertigan and Stokes to conduct an audit. The report stated:

Since 2000-01 the average growth in expenses has exceeded the growth in revenues by 1 percentage point;

Total expenses have risen faster than growth in the economy over the last five years—

in fact, it goes well before 2000. In real terms that means—

This situation raised the importance of procedures and processes that prioritise existing and new expenditures.

In March 2007 the risk created by Labor's financial mismanagement was highlighted by a report that stated:

The biggest risk to New South Wales' rating is its operating performance.

In 13 years the Government has been unable to match revenue with expenses, a basic premise of planning, or of any budget process. It has not been able to get them together. Today, after all the cuts and the statement that in 10 weeks it will take the world apart and get everything it can, what has happened to expense growth? It is higher. That is the big belly flop today: the Government wants to cut expenses and fix the problems once and for all, but expense growth is higher. We have all heard about fiscal strategy. Michael Egan, a former Treasurer, to his credit tried to do one thing right, although many things he did not do right. He wanted to build a shockproof New South Wales economy.

When the international economic crisis came, and that has been mentioned, it was stated that because of the surpluses created New South Wales would not have to cut services, infrastructure projects, announce a

North West Metro in June and cancel it a few months later because it all became a little too hard. New South Wales was to be in the position to deliver infrastructure and services ongoing. That is what Michael Egan said. Unfortunately, New South Wales spent and spent and spent. The mini-budget has cancelled infrastructure and raised taxes. The Opposition does have a plan, and we will get to that. A former economist with New South Wales Treasury for a number of years, Michael Carling, referred to the problems with New South Wales finance when he referred to the fundamental and long-running problem of too much spending for too little public benefit.

Michael Carling says this budget crunch has been festering for years and that the facts challenge the conventional wisdom that the Carr Government was tight-fisted, let alone its excesses. He says a pattern of high spending goes back to the 1990s and the reputation for restraint that survives from that era is mythology. He says it does not matter where you start, the continued annual running costs of the State Government took five years to go from roughly \$30 billion to \$40 billion and they are now well on their way to \$50 billion. The budget has not just now gone into deficit, it did so four years ago according to the definition that the Government favoured then, but which it of course dropped when it became inconvenient.

We have been running a deficit and playing with numbers, and the problem of expenses being out of control has been obvious for many years for all to see. We need only look at past budgets and inventing things like land tax invoices for Sydney airport—the spin doctors got together and there was no economic crisis to speak of, but the hollow men said, "We don't know what to do." "I know what we can do. We can find \$400 million by writing to the Federal Treasurer and saying we've got a land tax bill for—what do we need—\$401 million. Done. Fixed it. There it is, we've balanced the budget." That sort of trick has gone on. They said, "We've used unfunded super. Let's use different and old accounting standards because if we use old accounting standards we don't have to put as much in, which gives us a surplus." This sort of approach to financial management is what we have seen today. It is a big belly flop at a time of recession and economic difficulty. The Government has hit families with charges and cut infrastructure, and it is no-one's fault but that of members on the other side of the House.

The interesting thing about the Treasurer's speech, and there was very little that was interesting—particularly the way the Government attacked my community of Manly, but that will wait for another day; it was an appalling form of political non-pork barrelling—was that the Government had four goals in its plan. What are the four goals we have? The Leader of the Opposition and the Leader of The Nationals announced a plan for prosperity for New South Wales. They said we needed some fiscal constraints and to maintain the triple-A credit rating—I think we have heard that today—to ensure expenses growth would be less than or equal to revenue growth—interestingly we did not hear that today; that is the big problem because the Treasurer did not talk about it—and to restore and enhance the level of front-line services. Give that a tick, the Government picked up that goal as well.

The last goal was to ensure that Cabinet Ministers would be accountable for fiscal direction and infrastructure. The Treasurer spoke about an infrastructure levy, so the Government has taken that one as well. Four goals were released 10 days ago. The Government has had 10 weeks to work on this mini-budget. It has picked up three of our goals and said, "Hello sailor, here we go." The Government failed to provide a vision for New South Wales. There is no economic plan and there is no vision whatsoever for the future. The year 2011 cannot come soon enough.

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyang) [3.51 p.m.]: It is appropriate that the member for Manly has spoken because he is like a man on a desert island. Some of what he said makes sense and I think he actually has a grasp of some of the issues that confront New South Wales. Unfortunately, the rest of the people in his party have absolutely no idea. We should examine what the Opposition says. Opposition members say their approach is to cut taxes and cut revenue, but increase spending. Member after member from the Opposition stood up one after the other and said we should spend more and more money. That is a recipe for sending the State broke. That is why we on this side understand that this is a tough mini-budget. It contains some pain but it is spread across the whole of the community. We are prepared to do what needs to be done. Members on the other side are full of rhetoric. They are full of words; they get up and espouse a view of how everything should be, but if one looks closely at what they are saying one sees that they are saying nothing. They are all over the place.

On this side of the House we want policy that supports strong economic growth and generates revenue while at the same time protects front-line services. That is what today's mini-budget does. It protects front-line services—emergency services such as hospitals—and schools. We actually put more money into those services. The people of New South Wales need to understand that this Government is working to secure an affordable

future for them. That is what the mini-budget is all about. Today we learned from the Treasurer about the tough times we are facing. The member for Manly referred to the statements that were made by the former Treasurer, but it is the new Premier and the new Treasurer who have looked at the current situation and made the tough decisions because the economic situation has changed.

Nobody saw what was coming internationally, and it has affected this State. It has affected the revenues that come from housing, stamp duty and the GST. Six months ago or 12 months ago no-one would have said that that would be the case. This Government has recognised the problem and it has acted. The Government should be commended for that. One matter that is very pertinent to my electorate of Wyong is the extension of the first home buyer's grant by an extra \$3,000. Last week we announced a new housing development at Warnervale and this announcement will mean that young families will have a better chance of realising the dream of owning a new home. I commend this mini-budget. The Opposition should spell out its policy rather than rely on rhetoric.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury) [3.54 p.m.]: The sub-prime market collapse in America some 18 months ago saw hundreds of thousands of families displaced from their homes, causing havoc across the country. It is now flowing all over the world. The global financial market has collapsed and the New South Wales Government wants to note that there is a global economic crisis. It is a little bit slow on the uptake, as the shadow Minister for Finance pointed out. Today we learned that the New South Wales budget sank into a billion-dollar black hole, caused mainly by the downturn in the housing market and the lack of stamp duty flowing into the coffers of the New South Wales Government. What has the Government done today to stimulate the property market and secure the future for New South Wales residents? One can never do more to secure the future of residents than provide them with the opportunity to purchase a house. What did the Government do? Did it reduce its taxes on houses? No, it did not. Did it reduce its infrastructure levies? No, it did not.

Chris Richardson from Access Economics said today that the New South Wales Government should have removed its State taxes on houses that are causing a deadweight loss of reduced transactions. Ken Morrison from the Property Council said today that the land tax increases imposed in today's budget would cancel out the first home owner's grant. Ken Morrison has forgotten more about property and bringing housing onto the market than any of the dimwits or lesser lights of the New South Wales Government. We need to stimulate the housing market to stimulate the budget. A strong housing market and a strong economy go hand in hand, but the New South Wales Government cannot see that.

That is probably evident in the fact that the Government wants to note that there is currently a global economic crisis. That is a big statement from the Government today; it has actually recognised that. The Government is lagging behind a little bit, like infrastructure in New South Wales. If we were to not impose this land tax increase and were to remove the State infrastructure levies and not demand that Sydney Water try to reap \$50,000 out of every block of land for housing we would actually reduce the cost of homes by up to \$100,000. That would allow residents to purchase a home and that would stimulate the economy in New South Wales. I support the amendment moved by the shadow Minister for Finance.

Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN (Camden) [3.57 p.m.]: Needless to say, the Government will not support the amendment. I will leave it to the speaker in reply to deal with some of the fallacious arguments raised by the member for Manly and the member for Hawkesbury. New South Wales families are worried about the economic crisis. Each night on the news—we watch television, we do not always read the papers as has been implied—they deliver the same bad news. We know it is bad news because David Koch has had at least three specials on how bad things are—a volatile share market, companies going under and investments lost. People have only to look at their superannuation statements at the end of each month to know that things are very bad as a result of the global economic crisis.

Now more than ever they want to know that the Government is securing an affordable future for New South Wales, with responsible and measured management of the State's finances. Our mini-budget, which was delivered today, provides protection and reassurance for families in this State. The Opposition has provided nothing. I usually enjoy listening to the contributions of the member for Manly as he makes some good and cogent points, but today I heard nothing—no policy, no form, and no sign that Opposition members have heeded the hardships that families in New South Wales are facing. Opposition members appear to be in agreement with what I have had to say.

We have had to make some tough economic decisions, some of which have been in the too-hard basket for far too long. Today we took the too-hard basket, emptied it out, looked at the issues and dealt with them.

Ultimately, all the decisions that the Government has made are right for the future of New South Wales. The plan to introduce time-of-day tolling for the Sydney Harbour Bridge and to increase parking space levies will provide \$58 million for more new buses and new commuter car parks. Members of Parliament will contribute to that levy as they pay parking levies at Parliament House. This strong policy will generate revenue and get more cars off the road during peak times. It is a sensible and practical management of our limited road space and at the same time will improve the State's public transport capacity.

As families deal with financial challenges of their own they want reassurances that the New South Wales Government is making the right decisions to protect important infrastructure and services such as this. Families want to know that the New South Wales Government is providing protection for important infrastructure such as the 2,200 schools across the State—schools to which their children will go to grow and to learn. This week the Premier announced a maintenance program that will provide schools with funding for key projects, including school security fences, roof repairs and toilet upgrades. I am grateful for those projects because they will improve the maintenance of schools in my electorate of Coogee and in many other electorates throughout the State.

That initiative will give principals the flexibility to decide what is best for their schools and enable them to direct funding where it is needed most. More than 500 school projects will be delivered where they are needed most. It is a smart choice and it is the right choice. It is a policy that shows that the New South Wales Government listens, unlike Opposition members who are silent at a time when the most irresponsible thing they could do is to do nothing. Families deserve the sound economic management, strong policy and strong leadership that was shown today in the mini-budget.

Mr FRANK TERENCEZINI (Maitland) [4.00 p.m.], in reply: I listened carefully to the contribution of the member for Manly and I think he came up with a couple of ideas. His first idea related to a phone call and his second idea related to changing the accounting system. I was surprised by his suggestions because Opposition members often do not make any. However, I do not know what the member for Manly thinks those suggestions would achieve. I am sure he would like to elaborate on them and come up with more ideas, but he is hamstrung in what he can say. I thank him for his cogent suggestions and congratulate him on making them within the confines and restraints that Opposition members endure.

I thank the member for Hawkesbury for his contribution. Much of what he said is what Government members have been saying. At times I wondered whether the member for Hawkesbury was speaking for the Government rather than for the Opposition, as much of what he said echoed what Government members have said. Earlier the member for Wyong made a very good point when he said that these decisions would inflict some pain. The tough decisions that this Government is making will inflict some pain on communities in New South Wales but as a result we will receive \$150 million for school maintenance, an issue about which all members would be happy. Through its mini-budget the Government will ensure tax cuts and infrastructure projects.

This mini-budget is a budget for these times. I wish that the member for Manly, who is continuing to make suggestions, had been able to elaborate and to speak in depth about his suggestions. However, as I said earlier, he is constrained and he has to follow party orders. Maybe one day he will get an opportunity to say what he really thinks should be done. If the member for Manly were honest I am sure he would agree with what Government members are saying.

Mr Mike Baird: That is why you supported electricity privatisation.

Mr FRANK TERENCEZINI: That is why he supported electricity privatisation. However, at the time he was constrained and could not say much. It was good to hear some suggestions from Opposition members, even though they related only to a phone call and to reorganising the accounting system. Maybe that would help. I listened to the contributions of other Opposition members but, as I have said before, I did not hear anything that would be of any use to the people of New South Wales. All Opposition members can do is trot out the 10-day-old policy that they waved about today—a regurgitation of what they did before the 2007 election. In 2007 the people of New South Wales said that it was no good.

Question—That the words stand—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 48

Mr Amery
 Ms Andrews
 Mr Aquilina
 Ms Beamer
 Mr Borger
 Ms Burney
 Ms Burton
 Mr Campbell
 Mr Collier
 Mr Coombs
 Mr Corrigan
 Mr Costa
 Mr Daley
 Ms D'Amore
 Ms Firth
 Mr Furolo
 Ms Gadiel

Mr Gibson
 Mr Greene
 Mr Harris
 Ms Hay
 Mr Hickey
 Ms Hornery
 Ms Judge
 Ms Keneally
 Mr Khoshaba
 Mr Koperberg
 Mr Lalich
 Mr Lynch
 Mr McBride
 Dr McDonald
 Ms McKay
 Mr McLeay
 Ms McMahon

Ms Megarrity
 Mr Morris
 Mrs Paluzzano
 Mr Pearce
 Mrs Perry
 Mr Sartor
 Mr Shearan
 Ms Tebbutt
 Mr Terenzini
 Mr Tripodi
 Mr West
 Mr Whan

Tellers,

Mr Ashton
 Mr Martin

Noes, 38

Mr Aplin
 Mr Baird
 Mr Baumann
 Ms Berejiklian
 Mr Besseling
 Mr Cansdell
 Mr Constance
 Mr Debnam
 Mr Dominello
 Mr Draper
 Mr Fraser
 Ms Goward
 Mrs Hancock

Mr Hartcher
 Mr Hazzard
 Ms Hodgkinson
 Mrs Hopwood
 Mr Humphries
 Mr Kerr
 Mr Merton
 Mr O'Dea
 Mr O'Farrell
 Mr Page
 Mr Piccoli
 Mr Piper
 Mr Provest

Mr Richardson
 Mr Roberts
 Mr Smith
 Mr Souris
 Mr Stokes
 Mr Stoner
 Mr J. H. Turner
 Mr R. W. Turner
 Mr J. D. Williams
 Mr R. C. Williams
Tellers,
 Mr George
 Mr Maguire

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment negatived.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 48

Mr Amery
 Ms Andrews
 Mr Aquilina
 Ms Beamer
 Mr Borger
 Ms Burney
 Ms Burton
 Mr Campbell
 Mr Collier
 Mr Coombs
 Mr Corrigan
 Mr Costa
 Mr Daley
 Ms D'Amore
 Ms Firth
 Mr Furolo
 Ms Gadiel

Mr Gibson
 Mr Greene
 Mr Harris
 Ms Hay
 Mr Hickey
 Ms Hornery
 Ms Judge
 Ms Keneally
 Mr Khoshaba
 Mr Koperberg
 Mr Lalich
 Mr Lynch
 Mr McBride
 Dr McDonald
 Ms McKay
 Mr McLeay
 Ms McMahon

Ms Megarrity
 Mr Morris
 Mrs Paluzzano
 Mr Pearce
 Mrs Perry
 Mr Sartor
 Mr Shearan
 Ms Tebbutt
 Mr Terenzini
 Mr Tripodi
 Mr West
 Mr Whan

Tellers,

Mr Ashton
 Mr Martin

Noes, 39

Mr Aplin	Mr Hartcher	Mr Roberts
Mr Baird	Mr Hazzard	Mr Smith
Mr Baumann	Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Souris
Ms Berejikian	Mrs Hopwood	Mr Stokes
Mr Besseling	Mr Humphries	Mr Stoner
Mr Cansdell	Mr Kerr	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Constance	Mr Merton	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Debnam	Mr O'Dea	Mr J. D. Williams
Mr Dominello	Mr O'Farrell	Mr R. C. Williams
Mr Draper	Mr Page	
Mrs Fardell	Mr Piccoli	
Mr Fraser	Mr Piper	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Goward	Mr Provost	Mr George
Mrs Hancock	Mr Richardson	Mr Maguire

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! It being before 4.30 p.m., the House will now proceed to Government business.

**TRANSPORT ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT (RAIL AND FERRY TRANSPORT
AUTHORITIES) BILL 2008**

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 30 October 2008.

Mr JONATHAN O'DEA (Davidson) [4.16 p.m.]: The Transport Administration Amendment (Rail and Ferry Transport Authorities) Bill 2008 amends the Transport Administration Act 1988, the Passenger Transport Act 1990 and other Acts with respect to the corporate structure of Rail Corporation New South Wales—RailCorp—and Sydney Ferries, as well as the provision and regulation of rail passenger services and ferry services. The bill reorganises the corporate structure of existing rail and ferry agencies so that they are effectively de-corporatised and become statutory authorities. The corporate names of RailCorp and Sydney Ferries Corporation will be retained, as will a board for each authority with members appointed by the Government. Both boards will report directly to the Minister for Transport.

The Minister stated in his agreement in principle speech on 24 October that the main Government argument is, "We do not have sufficient control over RailCorp or Sydney Ferries to produce results", with the proposed changes to give the Minister direct control over the running of the rail network and ferries. If passed, the proposed legislation will represent a victory for the unions, which prefer dealing directly with Labor Ministers than with corporate-style boards. The real problem with rail and ferries has been union resistance and pressure not to introduce appropriate commercial practices including proper benchmarks.

We need more appropriate and professional governance; however, the role played by the Minister should not be as an operational manager. The Minister should ensure that senior managers do their jobs effectively. The Minister should set policy guidelines, not personally apply the policies on the ground. We should not have day-to-day political interference in vital services such as our trains and ferries. One has only to look at how poorly direct ministerial responsibility works for hospitals, schools, roads and other basic services. The suggestion that the Minister and Cabinet can do a better job directly running the trains and ferries appears to be either arrogant or stupid, or both.

As we have seen before, the New South Wales Labor Government has a conflict of interest because of its close relationship with unions that donate millions of dollars to it each year. This bill further increases the risk of political rather than merit-based decisions. It reminds me of a chairman of selectors of a certain local football club who was out of condition and had never played a serious game of football before. Faced with an appalling series of team performances and a rapidly diminishing group of supporters, he selected himself and a

club benefactor to play in the football team, resulting in an even worse outcome. Even if it were appropriate for the Minister for Transport to actively run operational activities, this Labor Government has a lack of members of Parliament with prior management experience in delivering major services in a competitive environment.

Unfortunately the vast majority of members of Parliament on the other side of the House come directly from an Australian Labor Party or union job. The former Chief of Staff of Premier Bob Carr, and now powerful Australian Labor Party connected lobbyist, Bruce Hawker, recently lamented that the percentage of such hacks had increased from 24 per cent in 1971 to 67 per cent in 2005. Little wonder Mr Hawker links the narrowing of the Australian Labor Party talent pool to a lack of trust between citizens and their elected representatives. What some speakers for the Government have ironically said is that transport services have to be brought back within the direct control of the State Minister so that they can be then outsourced to external organisations in competition with the State-owned provider. This seems to be like the old adage "one step back, two steps forward". However, the problem with taking one step backwards to take two steps forward is that the Government has proved that it does not really know how, or does not have the political will, to really move forward.

In April 2008, Boston Consulting Group released a report commissioned by the State Government recommending RailCorp implement tougher industrial reforms. The report was meant to provide direction for RailCorp and urged the retrenchment of more than 1,100 employees. Savings were to be spent on security, including specialised police to patrol trains and stations. The report went further and recommended that all maintenance of carriages be outsourced. This followed the collapse of an agreement between RailCorp and the unions to reform the rail maintenance depots by October last year. The Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal [IPART] independently discovered that \$480 million annual expenditure could be carved from the bloated RailCorp bureaucracy by 2012. In its latest report, the Independent Pricing and Regulatory Tribunal calculated the reforms would save New South Wales \$1 billion over four years.

A report conducted by the New South Wales Auditor-General in 2007 found that almost all trains experienced more failures than in the previous year and more than 90 per cent of CityRail's electric fleet was more than 10 years old, with 58 per cent more than 20 years old, and 33 per cent at least 30 years old. The report also found that a shortage of engineers threatened to derail major upgrade projects to Sydney's CityRail networks, causing delays and cost blow-outs, as well as risking the \$1.8 billion clearways project. More recently, RailCorp has been investigated by the Independent Commission Against Corruption [ICAC]. Its inquiries and reports have exposed a seemingly endless string of rorts. Recently ICAC handed down its fifth and sixth reports from its lengthy inquiry into bribery and fraud within RailCorp. The investigation showed how \$19 million worth of corrupt contracts had riddled RailCorp and provided the funds to pay millions more in kickbacks.

The Independent Commission Against Corruption has asked prosecutors to pursue numerous rail employees and private contractors after the biggest investigation in the agency's history. The Independent Commission Against Corruption has canvassed various corruption issues, which must be better addressed than previously. The ongoing corruption in RailCorp again demonstrates the lack of will of this Government to take firm action and address a clear culture of corruption in RailCorp. As an aside I further note that probably the most successful model adopted in recent New South Wales rail history is that involving the Australian Rail Track Corporation [ARTC], whereby the New South Wales Government sensibly handed over management of New South Wales regional rail networks by leasing and contractual arrangements.

The Australian Rail Track Corporation is a successful corporation. It is well governed and managed and has an independent board that is capably led by its chairman, Barry Murphy. It has a single Commonwealth shareholder that essentially leaves the organisation alone. Perhaps most importantly, when the Australian Rail Track Corporation says it will do something, it actually does it. As earlier speakers have stated, the New South Wales Government has released the report of a seven-month inquiry into Sydney Ferries conducted by Bret Walker, SC. The report recommended that the Government take out a service contract with a private operator that would then run and manage the service. The inquiry was called following several fatal accidents early last year and annual losses by Sydney Ferries of approximately \$50 million. Mr Walker was scathing about the option of returning the ferries to direct government control as a statutory authority without an independent board. He found:

Its key weakness as a model is that it supplies no more incentive for better governmental value for money than the present model, and may even reduce the present statutory pressure for efficiency.

He said that the statutory authority model provided taxpayers with less assurance of value for money than does the current corporatised model. The Government has complained about the Minister having to issue formal

directions to a State-owned corporation that can be cumbersome and time consuming, yet it has itself delayed introducing more meaningful benchmarks, service standards and professionalism. Real action is deferred by a transport Minister and Premier who announce that RailCorp and Sydney Ferries have been put on notice, but who seemingly are afraid of upsetting their union mates.

The New South Wales Opposition Leader, Barry O'Farrell, and shadow Minister for Transport, Gladys Berejiklian, recently released a plan to fix Sydney Ferries while improving existing services. This expands on the Coalition policy outlined in our discussion paper, "Towards One Network". The Government should study this policy properly and adopt it. The Coalition's policy would improve service delivery, maintenance and management—unlike the New South Wales Labor Government's plans, which will force commuters to wait even longer for our ailing public transport system to be fixed. In the insightful words of the *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial on 22 October, which were more extensively quoted by the member for Castle Hill, the Government's plans "amount to little more than studied prevarication".

The Coalition's policy aims to improve service delivery and fleet maintenance while Labor's announcements force commuters to wait another year before anything changes. The Government tells us that the Minister needs increased powers required to take decisive actions, while refusing to take action. Just like thousands of people on train platforms across Sydney every work day, we have to stand by, watching and waiting, while the Government fails in its service delivery responsibilities. The apparent confusion in the Government's arguments was further evident when some of its speakers suggested that train services will follow the type of model in place for bus services under which the New South Wales Government has entered contracts with various operators. But at the same time the member for Heathcote pointed out that because rail is inherently monopolistic, it would be very difficult to introduce contestability into rail. Guys, I know you like telling fairy tales, but please get your story right!

Worse still, the Government has axed the Office of the Coordinator General, removing an overarching function for delivering the State's infrastructure plan. This risks further feeding a silo mentality with insular decision making. Abolishing the Office of the Coordinator General will save just \$2 million a year, apparently, and now it appears that the final authority for the State's infrastructure program will be consolidated under the Minister for Finance, Minister for Infrastructure, Minister for Regulatory Reform, and Minister for Ports and Waterways, Joe Tripodi. At least today's media reports suggest that the Government is seriously considering the Coalition's idea of a transport coordination authority—an idea that was previously rubbished by the Government.

Recently the New South Wales Auditor-General delivered to RailCorp a blunt message that its trains are old, overcrowded and over budget. Commuters can also expect things to get worse because high petrol prices will force more people onto trains. A primary concern of New South Wales rail commuters is increased crowding, with more than half the passengers being clearly dissatisfied with crowding on most lines. Compounding this dissatisfaction is that all projects to replace or update carriages currently are late or are behind schedule, and almost one in four rail carriages fail every month, according to the independent New South Wales Auditor-General. The Government needs to do better. This bill is not an improvement on the current situation; it needs to be re-examined. We need real reform in the transport area. Unfortunately, the public will have to wait until March 2011 to see it.

[*Business interrupted.*]

REPORT OF AN INVESTIGATION INTO A COMPLAINT AGAINST THE HONOURABLE A. P. STEWART, MP

Mr John Aquilina, by leave, tabled a report entitled, "Report of an Investigation into a Complaint Against The Hon. A. P. Stewart MP", dated 10 November 2008.

TRANSPORT ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT (RAIL AND FERRY TRANSPORT AUTHORITIES) BILL 2008

Agreement in Principle

[*Business resumed.*]

Mr RUSSELL TURNER (Orange) [4.30 p.m.]: The Opposition will oppose the Transport Administration Amendment (Rail and Ferry Transport Authorities) Bill 2008. I am pleased to see the Minister

for Transport in the House this afternoon. Although this bill refers mainly to rail and ferry services in Sydney, I will highlight a few issues relating to country areas. The Legislation Review Committee, in its report on this bill, noted:

This Bill amends the Transport Administration Act 1988, the Passenger Transport Act 1990 and other Acts with respect to the corporate structure of Rail Corporation New South Wales and Sydney Ferries and the provision and regulation of rail passenger services and ferry services ...

It provides for the establishment of contracts that will stipulate what is expected of the rail and ferry authorities in terms of service levels, service alterations, performance standards, regular service reviews, community consultation and complaints handling.

The Minister in his agreement in principle speech said:

We need transport agencies that can effectively run safe and reliable services that the people of New South Wales expect and, importantly, deserve. We also need our transport agencies to be ultimately accountable to the people of New South Wales through their elected representatives. The Government is introducing this legislation to change the corporate structure of RailCorp and Sydney Ferries to make that happen. Under the current model, the Government does not have sufficient control over the operations of rail or ferry services. Even a matter of urgency or public safety requires a direction to the board and otherwise requires following a slow and cumbersome process.

I note that it was this Government that introduced all the rules and regulations. The Government promised that everything would change, but nothing appears to have changed and now we will go through another round of reform. Hopefully, if the intent of the bill is followed, we might slowly see some changes. I turn now to country passengers, XPTs and CountryLink services. A few weeks ago, when my Rex flight to Orange was cancelled, I decided to take the opportunity to travel on the XPT once again. The staff were terrific and the service should have been terrific. The train service from Sydney through Orange to Dubbo takes five hours. Most of the time it takes three to 3½ hours to travel the same distance by car. As I said, the XPT service was very good. The staff were good, and we were provided with breakfast and morning tea.

The XPT is capable of travelling at about 160 kilometres an hour, and it does so on a couple of sections between Sydney and Orange. I think we got close to that speed near Blacktown, between Blayney and Orange and between Orange and Dubbo. However, in other sections the XPT squeaks and rolls up through the mountains, especially between Bathurst and Orange, which takes about 1½ hours; it creaks and groans through Neville and Blayney at about 40 or 45 kilometres an hour. The trains are not the cause of the delays; the lines have not kept up with modern times. The line has not changed since the 1850s or 1860s, when the train first travelled over the mountains in that wonderful engineering feat. At that time the whole of the State was traversed by rail. Sadly, in many cases not much has changed.

A couple of weeks ago during the school holidays my wife decided to take one of our grandchildren from Orange to Wellington for a picnic in the park, with the joy of a train ride, and then catch the XPT from Wellington to Orange on its return journey to Sydney. Again, there was nothing wrong with the train or the staff, but the behaviour of some of the people on the train is one reason many people refuse to travel on the XPT and, I assume, other railway services. I refer to the foul language and behaviour of some people on the train—fortunately my grandson is only five and a lot of it went over his head. However, it was highly embarrassing to my wife who had to listen to such behaviour. A female supervisor spoke to the people who were behaving appallingly but she did not get anywhere. A male supervisor spoke to the people, with a little more luck. The people were simply asked to tone it down; they were not asked to get off the train and they were not issued with an infringement or anything like that. There was no incentive for them not to behave just as badly next time they travelled on the train.

My wife and I were reminded of why many people do not use the trains or CountryLink buses—they simply cannot cope with such behaviour and, as I said, the length of the journey. Many people who travel from Orange to Sydney drive to Lithgow or Mount Victoria and then catch the electric train because the XPT is so slow. As I said, it is not because of the train; it is because the track has not kept up with modern times. I have spoken to the operators of CountryLink services such as Selwoods in Orange and Ogdens in Dubbo, and their main complaint is the behaviour and vandalism that occurs on their coaches. The coaches cost \$600,000 or \$700,000 to put on the road, and often within a week the seats are ripped by passengers and there are other acts of vandalism. I do not know what we can do about it. In this day and age we seem to be prepared to accept such behaviour. Again, it is one reason many people do not use rail and CountryLink buses.

Despite what the Minister said about the Government upgrading this and that, if the behaviour of passengers is not dealt with it will not improve patronage on the XPTs and the CountryLink buses. When I am

in Sydney I travel on the electric trains. When I fly down from Orange I always catch the train from the domestic airport to St James station to come into Parliament House. I do not know what can be done about the graffiti on the trains, some of which has been half rubbed out. Surely a modern, clean train is more incentive for people not to graffiti or vandalise, or to leave rubbish behind. If people get on a train that is sad and dilapidated and that has rubbish and graffiti, that is an incentive for them to cause further damage. A few weeks ago I was in Western Australia for a short break. The trains in Western Australia were immaculate, with carpet on the floor. They were spotless compared to some of the trains in Sydney. In New South Wales the modern Tangara trains are clean and a pleasure to ride in, but some of the older ones are grimy on the outside and have graffiti on the inside. They do not provide an incentive for people to use public transport unless necessary.

The Opposition will oppose this bill because it does not believe services will be improved as much as the Government believes. The Opposition notes that currently the board of both RailCorp and the Sydney Ferry Corporation are appointed by this Minister and this bill will see both organisations retain boards, membership of which will also be appointed by the Minister. Therefore, the rationale for the bill is flimsy at best. The Opposition agrees that its provisions will increase the ability of unions to avoid having performance benchmarks imposed on the respective organisations, hence the workers, and it will make the organisations even less professional and standards will continue to fall. The Opposition hopes it is wrong, but time will tell. Unless the Opposition is provided with evidence that this bill will make necessary changes to make our public transport attractive, it does not believe it will achieve anything more than has been achieved in the past.

A disincentive for country people outside the city network which does not reach Orange but reaches Bathurst is that if people from Orange and further west want to travel to the city they have to travel from one network onto another one. Their fare is a \$2.50 pensioner concession ticket per person, but they each have to pay a \$10 booking fee each way. A couple would have to pay \$40 in booking fees to travel from Orange to Sydney and return. The Opposition believes that all people should be equal and no booking fee should apply. People who live in Sydney can travel all over Sydney for \$2.50 all day. Country people should be able to do the same. A person can travel from Orange to Broken Hill for \$2.50, but cannot travel from Orange to Sydney for a medical appointment or to visit relatives for \$2.50 without having to pay booking fees. The Opposition believes that is discrimination against country people. I call on the Minister to treat country people in the same way it treats their city counterparts.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL (Keira—Minister for Transport, and Minister for the Illawarra) [4.42 p.m.], in reply: I thank all members who have taken part in the debate on the Transport Administration Amendment (Rail and Ferry Transport Authorities) Bill 2008. In particular, I thank the members representing the electorates of The Entrance, Londonderry and Heathcote for their contributions, which were extremely thoughtful. The members showed they had given consideration to the content of the bill and that they understood the improved focus on service delivery and commuter benefits this bill will bring about. Disappointingly, but hardly surprisingly, the members representing the electorates of Willoughby, Castle Hill, Pittwater, Manly, Davidson and Orange indicated that the Coalition will not support the bill.

This bill clearly shows the Government is taking decisive action to improve accountability in the delivery of rail and ferry services and that the Government's first and foremost priority is improving service delivery for commuters. But what do those opposite do? They whinge, whine and complain but come up with little else in response. It is clear that the arm's length arrangements imposed under the State Owned Corporations [SOC] model has not worked for public transport. When it was introduced the intention was to drive RailCorp's and Sydney Ferries' management to deliver service and efficiency improvements for the benefit of both passengers and taxpayers. However, unlike the ports and utilities sectors, where the SOC model works well, public transport services are not profit-making enterprises. The nature of public transport means that the focus needs to be on service delivery, not on commercial objectives. This is what the community expects.

A very important point that those opposite have chosen to ignore is that we are moving to implement service contract arrangements similar to those we have with the State Transit Authority and the private bus operators. Recently in this place the Opposition spokesperson for Transport accused me of making misleading statements regarding the views expressed by Mr Bret Walker, SC, in the report of the Special Commission of Inquiry into Sydney Ferries Corporation. This is an offensive accusation and, as usual, the member for Willoughby has got the wrong end of the stick. The member for Willoughby stated, "Commissioner Walker did not support the returning of the Sydney Ferries Corporation to a statutory authority." Mr Walker canvassed several governance options in his report.

In analysing these options, Mr Walker was critical of each including both the State Owned Corporation model and the statutory authority model, and no-one is arguing with this. However, in my agreement in

principle speech I referred to Mr Walker's recommendations regarding a contract framework for Sydney Ferries services—not the recommended governance model. I will repeat this statement for the benefit of the member for Willoughby, "In keeping with the recommendations made by Mr Bret Walker, SC, this bill will also allow the Government to put arrangements that are similar to the current bus service contracts in place for ferry services." On this point Mr Walker stated:

... a detailed service contract is an effective means of regulating the relationship between the Government and a provider of public transport services. The Inquiry's research throughout Australia and internationally shows a widespread resort by Governments to what are, in effect, service contracts to specify and regulate the provision of public transport.

The member for Willoughby also said in relation to Mr Walker's recommendations that "the State Government not only ignored that advice, but pretended that the advice is to the contrary". I have already addressed the second part of that statement. The Government did not assert that Mr Walker's report supported the establishment of a statutory authority for the governance of Sydney Ferries. The first part of the statement charges the Government with ignoring Mr Walker's report. In fact, if the member for Willoughby had taken the time to read the report herself, rather than forming her arguments on media stories as per usual, she would have seen that in the development of this bill the Government relied on the valuable and expert information provided by Mr Walker and quite rightly sought to address his misgivings about the statutory authority model.

In addition, the Government has put both Sydney Ferries and RailCorp on notice. Both organisations must lift their game. The Premier has made very clear that if a private operator can deliver better quality services more efficiently than Sydney Ferries, then they will be awarded the new service contract. In the same way, a private sector business will be awarded the maintenance contract if RailCorp cannot demonstrate that it can perform maintenance services to better standards. Mr Walker was also concerned that Sydney Ferries, operating as a statutory authority, would have little incentive for efficiency and that the situation would continue to result in the Government—and, therefore, the taxpayer—having to cop the financial and organisational risk when things go wrong.

The Government accepted and appreciated Mr Walker's critique. The Government is addressing those concerns by making changes to the Passenger Transport Act through this bill, which will allow the Government to exercise appropriate oversight over service delivery through a clear and enforceable service contract. I note that if the Opposition is successful in voting down the bill there will not be the ability to get a clear and enforceable service contract. The Coalition places that at risk in its opposition to this bill. Like government and privately owned regular bus services and privately run ferry services, RailCorp and Sydney Ferries services will be delivered under a service contract with the Director General of the Ministry of Transport. These contracts will clearly stipulate the service levels to be provided and the performance standards required from rail and ferry operators. This bill represents an important step in providing better service delivery for rail and ferry commuters. I thank the members who took part in the debate. I commend the bill to the House.

Question—That this bill be now agreed to in principle—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 50

Mr Amery	Ms Gadiel	Ms McMahon
Ms Andrews	Mr Gibson	Ms Megarrity
Mr Aquilina	Mr Greene	Ms Moore
Ms Beamer	Mr Harris	Mr Morris
Mr Borger	Ms Hay	Mrs Paluzzano
Mr Brown	Mr Hickey	Mr Pearce
Ms Burney	Ms Hornery	Mrs Perry
Ms Burton	Ms Judge	Mr Sartor
Mr Campbell	Ms Keneally	Mr Shearan
Mr Collier	Mr Khoshaba	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Coombs	Mr Koperberg	Mr Terenzini
Mr Corrigan	Mr Lalich	Mr Tripodi
Mr Costa	Mr Lynch	Mr West
Mr Daley	Mr McBride	Mr Whan
Ms D'Amore	Dr McDonald	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Firth	Ms McKay	Mr Ashton
Mr Furolo	Mr McLeay	Mr Martin

Noes, 37

Mr Aplin	Mrs Hancock	Mr Roberts
Mr Baird	Mr Hartcher	Mr Smith
Mr Baumann	Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Souris
Ms Berejikian	Mrs Hopwood	Mr Stokes
Mr Besseling	Mr Humphries	Mr Stoner
Mr Cansdell	Mr Kerr	Mr J. H. Turner
Mr Constance	Mr Merton	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Debnam	Mr O'Dea	Mr J. D. Williams
Mr Dominello	Mr O'Farrell	Mr R. C. Williams
Mr Draper	Mr Page	
Mrs Fardell	Mr Piper	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Fraser	Mr Provest	Mr George
Ms Goward	Mr Richardson	Mr Maguire

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Passing of the Bill

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

REMEMBRANCE DAY: WILLIAM MATTHEW CURREY, VC, COMMEMORATIVE PLAQUE

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.56 p.m.], on behalf of Mr Nathan Rees: I move:

That this House:

- (1) recognises that 11 November 2008 is the ninetieth anniversary of the end of World War I;
- (2) acknowledges the bravery of the late William Matthew Currey, former member for Kogarah, whilst serving with the Australian Imperial Force, for his actions at Péronne, France, on 1 September 1918, which led to the awarding of the Victoria Cross; and
- (3) recognises this act of bravery by endorsing the Speaker's placement of a commemorative plaque in the Speaker's Square.

I am both honoured and proud to have moved this motion on this solemn but commemorative day, the ninetieth anniversary of the cessation of hostilities at the end of the First World War. Before I say a few words about William Matthew Currey, I will dwell a little on the significance of today being the ninetieth anniversary of the armistice and reflect a little on why in Australia we are proud to celebrate this day. I will refer also to the symbolism of Armistice Day, particularly the wearing of the Flander's poppy, which many members in the Chamber are wearing. After speaking about the Flander's poppy with many of my constituents and other people it appears that there is a degree of confusion as to its significance, particularly as many people recognise rosemary as the flower of remembrance.

On the celebration of Anzac Day we wear rosemary, not the Flander's poppy. So, what is the difference? The origin of rosemary for remembrance goes back many hundreds of years. Students of literature would remember that in *Hamlet* Shakespeare refers to rosemary as the flower of remembrance, and so it has been for many years. On the battlefields of France during the reign of King Henry V rosemary was a symbol of remembrance. Why is the Flander's poppy the symbol for Armistice Day? On the battlefields of France the poppy was regarded as a weed, as it grew in the grain fields. The poppy grows particularly well when the ground is disturbed.

Ironically, because of the hostilities taking place at the time and the tremendous impact of the gunnery, the flowers grew abundantly among the crosses and graves of the battlefields of France. People looking around the battlefields of France at the bright red flower were reminded not only of hope but also of resurrection and

the future. That is why the poppy has taken on a special significance. It was not really commented on much until Lieutenant-Colonel John McCrae, a Canadian medical officer who had been a professor at a Canadian university, made reference to the poppy after conducting the burial service for a very close friend and fellow officer Lieutenant Alexis Helmer of the 1st Brigade Canadian Field Artillery, on 2 May 1915. He referred to the Flanders poppy as being a symbol of hope amongst so much devastation and death. We owe to him the immortalisation of the poppy as a symbol of remembrance, particularly as it related to World War I and the battlefields of France.

In 1921 the Returned Soldiers and Sailors Imperial League of Australia, the forerunner to the Returned and Services League of Australia [RSL], adopted the red poppy as the official emblem of remembrance for Armistice Day. It started selling the poppy at that time for a shilling, which was a considerable amount of money in 1921. Out of that shilling, five pence went to French children, many thousands of whom had been dislocated by the war or orphaned and whose families had been dispersed far and wide; sixpence went to the league's welfare work; and a penny went to the league's national coffers.

The tradition of selling the poppy for various charitable works, particularly those associated with the families of returned servicemen, dates back to that time. In those days the flower was actually sold before Armistice Day, not on Armistice Day as it is now. It is great to think that the tradition of selling the poppy and raising money has gone on continuously since 1921. I take this opportunity to encourage people to purchase the poppy today and in the coming days. I had the honour last Monday week of launching the Poppy Day appeal on behalf of the Premier. I encourage all members not only to purchase the poppy and donate to the charitable cause it represents but also to wear it with great pride and honour in remembrance of those who have gone before us.

I turn now to the ninetieth anniversary of the armistice and the cessation of hostilities. We recognise that it has been a long time since the end of that war, which, as we have heard in the Chamber today, brought so much devastation to the youth of this nation at a time when Australia was very much a young country. It was also a time when the young people of this country through the shedding of their blood, and their heroism and mateship brought such great pride and honour to Australia and put Australia very much on the world stage.

I refer now to William Matthew Currey. Until now he has not been a very well-known figure. Who was he exactly? He was a unique character in many ways. He was born on 19 September 1895 at Wallsend in New South Wales, the son of William Robert Currey, a labourer and later a miner, and his wife, Mary Ellen nee Lang. He was educated at Dudley and Plattsburg public schools and moved to Leichhardt in Sydney where he found employment as a wire worker. It was hardly an occupation that would have earned much money in those days. We have to remember that this was a particularly young man. After the outbreak of World War I he twice attempted to enlist without his parents' consent. In fact he was barely 19 when he first tried to join the Army. He lied about his age, as so many young men did, to try to enlist and volunteer for the forces, but was discharged when the Army found out his real age.

He was then accepted for the Australian Imperial Force on 9 October 1916, which would have been literally just a few days after he turned 21. He was posted to the 4th Light Trench-Mortar Battery, embarking for France in November. On 1 July 1917 he was transferred to the 53rd Battalion and later that year he fought at Polygon Wood and then returned to the Somme. Private Currey was awarded the Victoria Cross for his part in the Australian attack at Péronne on 1 September 1918—a 22-year-old lad. What he did was an act not only of great heroism and courage but I think most people looking at it today from a reasonable perspective would think it was almost one of reckless enthusiasm.

He single-handedly attacked a German World War 1 77-millimetre gun and killed all its crew. In those days the 77-millimetre field gun had a crew of four men. There is one in North Sydney, although it is not the one that William Matthew Currey captured. It was captured on the battlefields close to where William Matthew Currey fought in August of that year, a few weeks before William Matthew Currey's attack on the field gun. The State War Trophy Committee allocated the gun to North Sydney Council in 1921 and it was unveiled by Major-General Sir Granville Ryrie. It had been captured by the 4th Battalion AIF east of Proyart, France, on 23 August 1918. We need to remember that William Currey's exploit was on 1 September 1918, not a great time later.

By capturing the field gun, which had been firing at very close range, after rushing it under heavy machine gun fire and killing the crew, Currey enabled his battalion to proceed. He then found that his battalion

came under heavy fire again later that same day. He worked around the flank of the position and opened fire with a Lewis gun, which was a forerunner to the machine-gun in those days, before rushing the post, inflicting many casualties and dispersing the survivors. His heroic action enabled the battalion's attack to proceed.

Not content to leave it at that, this somewhat reckless young man who had already killed a large number of enemy soldiers and wounded a number of others by attacking a field gun single-handedly and saving his entire battalion from heavy fire, found that at three o'clock the next morning part of his company came under heavy attack and needed to be warned about the way in which they could retreat from their position. He volunteered to warn the company, which had become isolated. Single-handedly he went out again into no-man's-land shouting his head off and drawing a large amount of fire. He did this not once, not twice but three times. On the third occasion he was wounded, his respirator was punctured and he was gassed.

Currey managed to get away and his company was safely retired. Despite his gas wound, William Currey saw out the war with the 53rd Battalion, arriving back in Australia in March 1919. In September he joined the New South Wales railways as a storeman and the next year, on 10 April, he married Emma Davies at St Saviour's Anglican Church, Punchbowl. While employed with the railways he became active in the Australian Labor Party and on 16 May 1941 he resigned his post to stand as a Labor candidate for Kogarah in the Legislative Assembly. He won the seat, thereby becoming the first Victoria Cross winner—I think at this stage the only Victoria Cross winner—to enter the New South Wales Parliament.

He was re-elected twice—in 1944 and in 1947—and was concerned about the interests of ex-servicemen. From 1930 to 1932 he served with the 45th Battalion in the Citizens Forces rising to warrant officer rank, and from 1940 to 1941 he served with the Australian Instructional Corps. It was a great tragedy when Currey suddenly collapsed in this Chamber on 27 April 1948, significantly, two days after Anzac Day, having participated at great length in the Anzac services that year, as he did every year. Currey, who was survived by his wife and two daughters, was cremated after a Presbyterian service that was attended by four Victoria Cross winners. His portrait by John Longstaff is in the Australian War Memorial collection.

Why are we going through this today and what is the story about the plaque? The good people in the Kogarah electorate raised some funds to erect a plaque in memory of William Currey, and in 1956 that plaque was erected in the Speakers Square. Members would be aware that in the early 1970s substantial renovations were undertaken in this Chamber and in the older section of Parliament House. The plaque was removed and placed in a cardboard box, presumably for safekeeping but, as so often happens when renovations take place—I am sure that from time to time members have all been subjected to renovations at their places—the box ended up in the basement and remained there. As Speaker I always took an interest in the history of these parliamentary precincts.

Three years ago, after talking to our archivist, I went down to the basement to look at some of the stuff that had been stored in shoeboxes and in other things, and I found a mass of documents, photographs, and heaven knows what else. When I came across this plaque I wanted to know the story about the person to whom it belonged. At that stage the Parliamentary Library did a fair amount of work researching material relating to William Matthew Currey and unfolded this somewhat tragic but nonetheless heroic story of a 22-year-old man whose actions defied belief and who was awarded the Victoria Cross. William Currey was not a decorated officer and he never had rank at that stage. He was just a plain private who lied about his age, as so many people did, to get into the Army before the age of 21.

William Currey was discharged when the Army found out that he was too young to enrol, but he finally succeeded in his dream of joining the Army literally a few days after his twenty-first birthday. Within a short period he was sent to the battlefields of France and there he engaged in his heroic exploits and was wounded. He came back to Australia, joined a political party and served as the member for Kogarah, having been elected on three successive occasions. His story is truly remarkable and is a great Australian story in every sense of the word. William Currey was a young man of great heroism who did not rest on his laurels. Having already served his country and the democratic cause with outstanding vigour, he came back to serve his country in another way—as an elected representative in this Chamber.

On behalf of the Premier and the Government I am proud and honoured to speak in debate on a motion that recognises the ninetieth anniversary of the end of World War I and the significance of the symbolism that we all wear, the poppy of Flanders Field. This motion recognises the outstanding heroism of William Matthew Currey, a former member for Kogarah, and his great contribution to Australia in so many ways, and it endorses the action of the Speaker in placing William Currey's commemorative plaque back in the Speakers Square

where it was located for 20 years before being pulled down prior to renovations and subsequently being lost in the bowels and entrails of the parliamentary precincts. That plaque, which is no longer lost, has been restored to its former glory in recognition of a man of great heroism—a great Australian.

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL (Ku-ring-gai—Leader of the Opposition) [5.15 p.m.]: Just a few months before the acts of heroism that earned Bill Currey his Victoria Cross, General John Monash was appointed the commander of the Australian Army Corps. Monash is one of my heroes. For me his life characterises the indomitable Australian spirit—our ability to respond to whatever challenge comes our way whether the cause is war, weather, or want. Enjoying success in a career before the war, Monash saw the clouds gathering across Europe and set about preparing himself for the coming conflict. He landed at Gallipoli on 26 April and left at its end, eight months later, with a reputation as a leader upon whom men could rely, a commander who meticulously planned for battle, and someone who understood the value of life at a time when so much was wantonly wasted.

By war's end Monash had earned many honours. Knighted on the field of battle, regarded by a future prime minister of Britain as the greatest soldier of World War I, distinction came Monash's way despite what one historian described as his handicaps—his Jewish faith, Prussian heritage, colonial birth and a militia, not regular Army, background. Monash's wartime success reflects another Australian characteristic: that people's reputations and achievements are determined by their own efforts. They are not based upon who their parents are, the size of their bank balance, or a string of qualifications. On this day—the ninetieth anniversary of the end of World War I—I reflect on another aspect of Monash, one that members of Parliament recognise in so many of the veterans that we have the honour and privilege of meeting as we go about our duties. Despite all the success and distinction it brought him, Monash was no reveller in war. He was never one to take pride in the death and destruction that armed conflict created. In 1917 he wrote in a letter to his wife:

I hate the business of war—the horror of it, the waste, the destruction, the inefficiency. My only consolation is the sense of doing my duty to my country, which has placed a grave responsibility upon me. I owe something to the men whose lives and honour are in my hands to do as I will. But once my duty is done and honourably discharged, I shall with a sigh of relief turn my back once and for all on the possibility of ever again having to go through such an awful time.

Those 416,000 Australian men and those 2,500 Australian women who enlisted in World War I did so out of a keen sense of duty to this nation. More than 63,000—one in five of all those who served overseas—paid the ultimate sacrifice to ensure that we, their grandchildren and great grandchildren might live lives as free and as full of opportunity as they had enjoyed at the outbreak of war. All those who returned, like Monash, were dedicated to what ultimately would prove to be a forlorn hope—that no-one should again be required to endure the hardships, experience the terrors and witness the horrors of war. As Leader of the Opposition and as Leader of the Liberal Party I am again pleased to publicly acknowledge the sacrifice of that generation of men and women who went to war in defence of the freedoms that we now enjoy and that all too often we take for granted.

Despite their experiences and regardless of the injuries they suffered, returned veterans like Bill Currey sought to make this State and nation a better place. They did so despite carrying the scars of that conflict: scars that altered the course of their lives, sometimes changed their personalities and, all too often, shortened their life spans. Eight years after the end of World War I almost 23,000 veterans were in hospitals around this nation. One of them, Private Bill Shirley, had sailed to war in January 1916. Like many, he suffered from ailments resulting from the inhumane use of gas during the fierce battles on the Western Front, plus the added complications of tuberculosis.

Between 1926 and 1928 Bill Shirley was cared for at Lady Davidson Convalescent Hospital located at North Turramurra, within what is now my electorate of Ku-ring-gai. For 18 months and despite ill health, Shirley laboured to carve out of the sandstone a one-eighth size model of the Great Sphinx of Giza. He did so as a personal memorial to his fallen comrades. Bill Shirley died not long after completing this unique monument. The sphinx sits there today—just near the gates of Ku-ring-gai Chase National Park—and has been used by local school students on Remembrance and Anzac days to honour the sacrifices of Bill Shirley, Bill Currey and all the other veterans of that terrible conflict.

William "Bill" Matthew Currey is rightly honoured as the only Victoria Cross winner to ever sit as a member of this Parliament. Not once, not twice, but three times on 1 September 1918 Currey displayed what one of his commanding officers described as "conspicuous gallantry and daring". First, under machine-gun fire, Currey captured a 77-millimetre German field gun that had been wreaking death and injury upon his company. He followed up by single-handedly rushing an enemy strong point comprising 30 men and two machine-guns,

killing four, wounding two and causing the others to flee. Later that same night Currey volunteered to get a message to an isolated company. His feat is best described in the words of his commanding officer, Captain W. E. Smith:

Private Currey volunteered to carry a message over the open ground which was swept continuously by intense Machine Gun Fire. He crossed the ground, but, being unable to locate the company returned for further directions and immediately went out again, but was still unable to locate the Company. During this trip he was very badly gassed. Despite this he made a third attempt and this time was successful. He brought back valuable information which was urgently needed and shortly afterwards the Company Withdrew. His magnificent courage and devotion to duty undoubtedly saved the lives of many of his comrades.

For his courage, Currey was awarded the empire's highest honour—the Victoria Cross. Instituted in 1856—the same year Britain granted New South Wales responsible government—Victoria crosses are to this day made from the metal of Russian guns captured at Sebastopol during the Crimean War. Just 67 Victoria crosses were awarded to Australians during World War I. The day of Bill Currey's exploits, 1 September 1918, was a momentous day in the annals of Australia's military history. On the same day Bill Currey earned his Victoria Cross, five other Australians also gained the nation's highest honour: Albert Lowerson, Robert Mactier, and Edgar Towner, along with two New South Welshmen, Alexander Buckley of Warren and Arthur Hall of Granville. Alex Buckley and Bob Mactier died carrying out their acts of bravery. It should be noted that the Victoria Cross is the only military bravery honour that can be awarded posthumously.

Many other Australian soldiers perished during World War I without any recognition, despite having carried out extraordinary deeds of self-sacrifice in defence of their mates, this nation and their commitment to freedom. Remembrance Day allows us to recall and honour the deeds of all those men and women who gave their lives in the desire that we could continue to live freely and safely in this country. This motion also permits us to recognise others who served in this place, and in uniform, throughout our history—people ranging from Major D'Arcy Wentworth, who was elected to the blended Legislative Council in 1843, through to Major Charlie Lynn in the current Parliament. Their service across 54 parliaments can be as obvious as the plaque displayed here on the Chamber wall in honour of Lieutenant Colonel George Braund, the Liberal member for Armidale, who died at The Nek and Sergeant Ted Larkin, the Labor member for Willoughby, who died at Lone Pine during the Gallipoli campaign, or the service of these former members can be less obvious.

In reading Bill Currey's condolence motion, I was struck by the contribution of the then Leader of the Opposition, another Liberal, Vernon Treatt, who spoke warmly of the comradeship that Currey brought with him to Parliament. But he also spoke with first-hand knowledge of a gunner and of the impact of the actions of Bill Currey's 53rd Battalion on troops at the time. Treatt told this place:

Many Australian troops feared that the Germans would make a stand at Peronne and prevent the continuance of the advance! When we learned that the Somme had been crossed and Peronne captured there can be no doubt of the stimulating and inspiring effect upon the Australian troops.

As we pause to honour Bill Currey today and agree to erect the memorial in his honour, I urge you, Mr Speaker, to compile a record of the names of all those who have served the colony, State or nation, before or during their service in this place—and the other place—so that their memories can help remind us of the truly important and honourable task of politics. In February 1929 General Sir John Monash officiated at the opening of the Cenotaph in Martin Place, where this morning yet another memorial service took place to commemorate the actions of those who fought and those who gave their lives in World War I. Two years earlier on Anzac Day Monash declared:

On us who have survived the stress of war and who have been safely returned to our homeland is laid the duty of helping to restore to Australia the mighty loss of that legion of men by devoting our lives and energies to that class of nation building in which they would have shared had they been spared.

Monash and the other 400,000 are today reunited, watching us as we seek to carry on that task of nation building for which too many gave their lives. They responded without hesitation and they never gave up regardless of risk: they knew their mates would never let them down. We owe it to their memory—their sacrifices—to keep the flames of freedom and opportunity alive in this State and nation. We owe it to ourselves to salute their courage, to admire their determination and to honour their mateship. Lest we forget.

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [5.26 p.m.]: The Leader of the Opposition referred in his remarks to Sir John Monash. He may want to hear my comments. He said that a future historian had said that John Monash was of Jewish stock and civilian, and was not appropriate to serve as a general in charge of the Australian forces towards the end of the war in 1918.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: You were wrong.

Mr ALAN ASHTON: No I was not. If he waits he will hear the answer.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: You were wrong, I said.

Mr ALAN ASHTON: I indicated that that journalist was C. E. W. Bean, who was Australia's official war correspondent. The House has now heard four times the Leader of the Opposition say I am wrong. I am correct. The beauty of this is that because of the sacrifice of those soldiers we can have this debate in this place. If one refers only to last weekend's newspapers, there was a very detailed account of what Sir Charles Bean thought of Sir John Monash. Charles Bean said that Monash was Jewish and had a sense of superiority that goes with his race, and that he would not recommend him to be in charge of the Australian soldiers.

Charles Bean in fact recommended that Brudenell White should be in charge of the Australian military forces in 1918. Charles Bean clearly was wrong in that assessment and later admitted, 30 years after the death of Sir John Monash, who died in the early 1930s, that he was wrong and should have recommended that Sir John Monash be in charge of the Australian forces. Members do not have to take my word or that of the Leader of the Opposition: that is the beauty of history. However, I will add that David Lloyd George, who became Prime Minister of Great Britain in 1916, was known as an easterner. He believed that the attack through Gallipoli to defeat the Russians, get Bulgaria out of the war and put pressure on the Germans was the way to win the war. That was tried in 1915, as we know in this country, because we call that series of battles in the Dardanelles the Gallipoli campaign.

That 1915 Gallipoli campaign is what we commemorate on 25 April each year. Prior to that, attempts had been made to win the war through the Western Front. As we all know, the Western Front was prosecuted by King George V and certain generals, particularly Douglas Haig, an old soldier of Scottish Methodist background who believed that the war could be won on the Western Front with cavalry. How he could continue to think the war could be won with cavalry after the British Army had lost 400,000 horses dead, killed or drowned in the mud is impossible to imagine. But that was the mindset of the generals who went off to fight World War I.

An interesting fact is that David Lloyd George absolutely hated Douglas Haig, and the feeling was mutual. However, Haig had the most important supporter anyone could have needed—the King of England, who was also the King of the Empire of which Australia was a part. It is very interesting that two people who had completely different views and hated each other both had a great deal of faith in Sir John Monash, who led Australian soldiers who helped halt the German advance at Villers-Bretonneux and later took Peronne. Recently we celebrated the victory that on 8 August 1918 turned back the Germans from Villers-Bretonneux. Ludendorff and Hindenburg referred to it as the absolute turning point of World War I because after that the German forces continually moved back.

I mention that simply because history is not quite as clear-cut as people on all sides of the discussion would make out. We could argue that General Haig did not know much different from what he advocated because he was a cavalryman who had studied the battles of the Boer War and, as the Leader of the Opposition said, the battle of Sebastopol and other battles during the Crimean War. As well, all the leaders of that era learned the great poetry of that time, such as *The Charge of the Light Brigade* by Tennyson:

Into the valley of Death
Rode the six hundred ...

Haig hated Lloyd George and Lloyd George hated Haig, but they came to the view that Monash was the best man for the job. However, Charles Bean was the man who asserted that General Monash, of Jewish background and typical of his race, was pushy and should not be appointed. However, we should remember that it was he who formulated the idea, and almost brought it to the attention of the Americans and the British, that it was useless attacking enemy trenches without moving in concert with artillery and moving up tanks to hold whatever ground had been gained.

In the first couple of years of the war, each army would shell the enemy's trenches and charge them, but the shelling would not be done at the same time as the charge. Tanks were scarcely available and frequently became bogged or broke down. Under those circumstances, the enemy simply counter-attacked. Soldiers went over the top of their trenches to fight but many of the battles ended in stalemate. Australian troops referred to "hopping the bags" as they ran forward to fight.

It is very significant during this commemorative discussion to talk about Private William Currey winning a Victoria Cross and being elected as a member of Parliament. One would not expect someone who won a Victoria Cross to do both. The very nature of the award connotes a fifty-fifty chance of recipients being awarded the Victoria cross posthumously, and it was often awarded posthumously. Australians won more Victoria Crosses than most, taking into account our population during World War I. Australians were used as shock troops because all Australian service personnel had volunteered. That should be remembered as we celebrate Private Currey's career, and commemorate his service as well as the service of all soldiers who fought in wars Australia has been involved in. Remembrance Day honours all soldiers.

Along with many other members of the Parliament, I attended this morning's ceremony in Martin Place. We must recognise that since World War I Australians have fought in many wars. While different political views are held about our participation in those wars, what unites all Australians is the sacrifice made by service men and women, not only at the cost of their own lives on battlefields but also, if they survive, at the cost of their future and that of their families. I must point out that when World War I broke out, on all sides there was enthusiasm. The German soldiers were quite happy because they were heading off to Paris and would be there at Christmas, by which time they thought the war would be over. The soldiers in London were happy because they were heading over to Paris on the way to Berlin, and they also thought that the war would be over by Christmas.

The men and women who volunteered—including women who served in the nursing units and in the Voluntary Aid Detachment [VAD] forces—had a bit of fun on their way to the war. Certainly when troop ships stopped at various places on their way to Europe, there were natives who could be tricked and who could provide some fascination for our soldiers who were on their way to their great adventure. As we all know, before Australian troops arrived in Gallipoli, they went through Cairo. Even today some Egyptians are still getting over what happened!

I am reminded of a poem by Rupert Brooke, *Peace*, which typifies youthful enthusiasm in, "Now, God be thanked Who has matched us with His hour ...". Brooke described his enthusiasm for fighting the war and not wanting to miss a great opportunity. He attacked the cowards and "sick hearts" who would not join up and play the game by fighting in Europe and later on at Gallipoli. The interesting fact about Rupert Brooke, aside from the fact that he was a great poet and great fighter who fought on the Western Front, is that he died as a result of a mosquito bite. That is rather typical of the tragedy that befell so many of the soldiers who fought in that war. The mosquito bite gave him blood poisoning and he died on one of the Greek islands before he even set foot on Gallipoli.

I am reminded of yet another poem, this time one by Wilfred Owen who wrote what I regard as the greatest poem of World War I, *Dulce Et Decorum Est*. It is a long, tragic and wonderful poem, but for all the wrong reasons. It tells the story of a gas attack and of a soldier who had been gassed because he was not able to put on his mask in time. As they lifted him in the back of the cart, his head was hanging out the back, and out of his head oozed green poison, or vile "cud", as it is referred to in the poem. Owen wrote that if we could see the gassed man's face, "like a devil sick of sin", as they dragged him back towards the line, we would not say to young people who are desperate for ardent glory, "*Dulce et decorum est pro patria mori*", which translates to "It is soft and beautiful to die for one's country." It is not. It is better to live for your country than to die for it.

But because Australians have made the ultimate sacrifice and have died for their country, it is only proper that we should remember them. Many members have spoken on earlier occasions about the sacrifice made by previous generations of Australians. It is true that no matter what divides Australians, what unites us is that many of us, like me, have relatives or friends who fought in World War I or World War II, as my father did, or, like me, have mates who fought in the Vietnam War. All of our electorates would have constituents who have relatives or friends who are deployed in Timor, Afghanistan, Iraq or the Solomon Islands. Australia has always been proud to do its bit, and more. The Leader of the Opposition rightly referred to the Australians who volunteered for World War I. Australia is the only nation whose service men and women were all volunteers during that war. We did not introduce conscription. Twice there was an attempt to introduce conscription in Australia during World War I, and on both occasions it was rejected.

Conscription was rejected not just by people in Australia, women particularly, but also by the soldiers at the front. Billy Hughes counted on soldiers at the front voting to bring other men over to the war, but they did not. They voted on the basis that they had volunteered to come to the war and while many may have wanted people to volunteer and provide assistance—perhaps in response to a great deal of propaganda that was circulating with that desired effect—they did not vote in sufficient numbers to force people through conscription to fight in the war. That gives Australia a unique position because Australians who fought in World War I were

all volunteers. In my electorate, particularly in the suburb of Milperra, there are a number of streets that commemorate battles of World War I. As the Leader of the Opposition was speaking, I wrote a list of some of the ones I know, such as Amiens Street, which commemorates famous battles, and Somme Street, which commemorates the Battle of the Somme on 1 July 1916. That was the day when more British soldiers died than previously in the history of Great Britain as a nation. Sixty thousand soldiers were either killed or wounded on that one day.

Some of the books and poems that have been written about the Battle of the Somme reveal that all the British and Allied soldiers thought there would not be a German to attack because they all would have been killed by artillery during a barrage that continued for approximately 15 days and could be heard in London. Millions of shells were fired at the Germans, and they were convinced that the barbed wire would be cut. I do not know if anyone knows this, but when shells thrown amongst a lot of barbed wire explode all it does is move the barbed wire from one place to another; it does not cut the barbed wire enough to enable people to get through.

When the troops attacked on the first day of the Somme they were slaughtered by the German machine guns. The Somme is a street in my electorate, as is Dernancourt. Birdwood is named after a general, and Haig is named after the main general of World War I. Bullecourt was one of Australia's great battles in World War I, Pozieres was one of the most famous battle sites. There is also a Fleurbaix Street and a Monash Street in my electorate. I turn now to Fromelles. The Fromelles battle is being studied at length now. Patrick Lindsay wrote a book in which he gave credit to Lambos Englezos, a Greek-born schoolteacher from Melbourne, who researched what happened and found the 400 or 500 buried bodies in the Fromelles area. The Australian soldiers referred to Fromelles as a stunt. Today we use the word "stunt" in political terms—for example, we say, "The Leader of the Opposition is pulling a stunt"—but its original connotation goes back to World War I.

Basically, a stunt meant that a battle did not need to be fought. But to get the Australians ready for action and to see what they could do, they were organised to attack Fromelles. Some 5,000 or 6,000 Australians were killed or injured in one night. That is almost equivalent to the number who died in Gallipoli during a campaign that continued for many months. Fromelles was a disaster. When the bodies were buried the Germans did their best to reclaim badges and to recognise the soldiers in some way. But it is only in the past year that we have found where the bodies have been buried, and now there is a debate about whether they should be brought home or left there to be buried properly and given proper credit.

World War I was supposed to be the war to end all wars. I refer to the plaque on the wall opposite; members on this side of the House have been looking at the plaque for many, many years. The plaque does not say "World War I"—it refers to George Frederick Braund and Edward Larkin who were, interestingly, a Labor member and a Liberal member—it says "the Great War". That plaque went up before 1939. A reasonably good historian can work that out; if the plaque had been put up after World War II it would have said "World War I". It says "the Great War" because when it was placed on the wall there had not been a Second World War. The soldiers who fought in that war all argued that God was on their side. That was the irony of it all—the British, the French, the Germans, and all the others fighting, were Christians, with the exception of the Turks. That is just one of the tragedies.

Today I pay homage to those two gentlemen, as well as to Private Currey. Obviously I recognise his acts of bravery and endorse the Speaker's placement of the special plaque. It is something we should do. It does not mean that we are glorifying war. When I was attending school—the Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs might sympathise with this in part—the Vietnam War was unpopular, and was seen to be a very political war. However, I never saw World War II, World War I or any other wars in the same context. I never bore any ill will towards the soldiers who fought in Vietnam. Many years later Paul Keating instigated a proper return for the Vietnam veterans. He was not being political; it was simply an act of happenstance.

Mr Thomas George: Is he going to Gallipoli?

Mr ALAN ASHTON: No, he said he is not. It is interesting that the member for Lismore has asked that question. I do not want to get into a debate about Paul Keating but if one carefully reads what he said I do not think he was belittling Gallipoli but saying that we should also remember the 46,000 Australians who died on the Western Front. Gallipoli was our first baptism of fire but after Gallipoli, which was a military disaster, our soldiers went to the Western Front, where virtually universally wherever they went it was a victory celebration. Those soldiers fought in mud up to their necks and in blood. They fought literally next to their friends who had been literally blown to smithereens.

The best thing that could happen to a soldier in World War I was to get what was called a Blighty. If a soldier's hand was blown off he was sent back to England. For a little while those soldiers were heroes because people would say, "Look at that bloke, he lost an arm" or an eye, an ear or a leg. "Good on you mate". By about 1920 or 1921 people were saying, "Look at that cripple, what is he doing there?" The war to end all wars did not last long in people's minds and memories; unfortunately people forgot it fairly quickly. Unfortunately for us, one country that did not forget was Germany. Germany lost the war but not one Allied soldier ended up on German soil. As not one Allied soldier ever set foot on German soil in battle it was easy for Hindenburg, Ludendorff and Adolf Hitler in particular to say that the German army had been betrayed in the field and that Germany had been betrayed by spies, spivs, Jews, slackers, communists, socialists and others. Partly as a result of the Versailles Treaty we ended up with the rise of Hitler.

I am glad to have had this opportunity to place those thoughts on the record today as we celebrate the life of William Matthew Currey and commemorate his bravery. Many of us have attended commemoration ceremonies in our local schools and RSL clubs in the past few days. I am a proud patron of the Padstow RSL club. We get all sorts of different politics in RSL clubs but one thing we should be united about—even if I slightly disagree with the Leader of the Opposition, who has a different opinion about Sir John Monash—is that the young people who volunteered did not know what they were getting themselves into. They came back mentally scarred and were not treated as well by all governments as they should have been. But we will never forget them. We have not forgotten them.

Mr ANDREW STONER (Oxley—Leader of The Nationals) [5.54 p.m.]: On behalf of The Nationals I join with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in remembering and honouring those who made the ultimate sacrifice in defending our freedom. Between nine million and 13 million soldiers were killed during World War 1—a figure that today seems unfathomable. Of those, some 63,000 were Australians. A further 156,000 Australians were wounded in action, gassed or taken prisoner. To these men, we owe our deepest gratitude. They came from throughout Australia, many just boys. From a population of just five million, nearly 417,000 Australians enlisted to fight for their country. Notably, a significant number of imperial force recruits came from country areas—a reflection of the decentralised population in Australia at the time.

Many of these men were recruited through the so-called snowball marches. During these marches a group of men would set out from a regional centre and head for Sydney, Brisbane or Melbourne on foot, picking up more men as they marched. The first of these marches became known as the Cooee March and started with 26 men in Gilgandra in 1915. At each town en route to Sydney the marchers would shout "Cooee" to attract recruits and hold meetings. By the time they reached Sydney one month later the number had reached 263, and the original men had marched 320 miles. Along the way townsfolk in places like Orange and Dubbo would provide food and shelter for the men—a sign of the spirit that still exists in country towns today.

Marches also departed from Nowra, Wagga Wagga, Narrabri, Delegate, Tooraweenah, Grafton, Daroobalgie and Albury, where incidentally the marchers travelled by train. In total, about 1,500 men from country New South Wales marched, and they are credited with encouraging up to two or three times that number of men to enlist. Sadly, many of these men perished. One would be hard-pressed to find a country town that does not have a cenotaph detailing scores of names of the young local people killed in the Great War and subsequently in the Second World War.

It is a constant reminder of the sacrifices made for our country by everyday people. One such man was William Matthew Currey, who would later become a member of this place, and whom we honour today with the rededication of a plaque in the Speaker's Square. Born in Wallsend in 1895, Currey twice attempted to enlist with a false age without his parents consent but was discovered and discharged. He was persistent though and in 1916 was accepted into the Australian Imperial Force and later transferred to the 53rd Battalion. In 1918 Private Currey was awarded the Victoria Cross [VC] for his part in the Australian attack at Peronne, where his bravery and selflessness saved countless Allied lives but saw him gassed. He returned to Australia in 1919, married and later became involved in politics.

In 1941 Bill Currey was elected as the member for Kogarah, the first VC winner to enter this Parliament. He was re-elected twice before sadly passing away in 1948. During his time in this place, Bill Currey had particular concern for the interests of ex-servicemen and women, understanding too well the impact on them and their families of living with the legacy of war. His story has particular resonance with me personally as both a member of this place and as the grandson of a man whose story is remarkably similar to his. My maternal grandfather, Arthur Sylvester Brown, served during the Great War in the 5th Light Horse Regiment. I have subsequently found out that like Bill Currey he lied about his age to enlist from his hometown

of Grafton, making his way from Brisbane on the vessel *Kyarra* to Egypt. Although the official records show his age as 19, I know he was only 17 when he enlisted in October 1915. In fact, he turned 18 during his voyage at sea.

From Egypt he was sent to Turkey as part of the Australian New Zealand Army Corps or the ANZACS. He then went to France where he fought in the most horrific theatre, that is, the Western Front in Europe. There my grandfather fought in the Third Battle of Ypres, also known as the Battle of Passchendaele, the scene of intense and sustained battles with heavy artillery, machine guns and hand-to-hand combat between the German and Allied forces. He told my mother of a Christmas Eve when they downed weapons and went over and shared Christmas celebrations with the Germans, whom he described as "boys"—bear in mind he was all of about 19 at that time. It was there, at Ypres, late in the war that my grandfather, again like Bill Currey, was gassed by German forces, severely damaging his lungs. One of his lungs collapsed and he spent the rest of his life with only one lung.

My grandfather was repatriated to hospital first in France and then on to London. Thankfully he survived, otherwise I would not be here. On the journey home to Australia he learned of the Armistice, which occurred on this day 90 years ago. He re-settled in Grafton where he resumed his employment as a typesetter with the local paper, the *Daily Examiner*. I recall my grandfather fondly. Like many, he did not talk about the war but I know that he suffered physically and mentally, like many other survivors of the war that is widely acknowledged as the most horrific and dreadful conflict of all time. My grandfather lived until what was, for servicemen who returned from the worst of the Great War, the ripe old age of 71, despite the fact that he continued to smoke roll-your-owns with just one lung right to the end.

Today holds special significance for my family and I, and so many other Australians, as we remember and honour those who sacrificed so much for our great country. As Leader of The Nationals I also make mention of former Country Party members of this place who risked their lives in the Great War on the battlefields of Europe. They include: Lieutenant Colonel the Hon. Sir Michael Bruxner, former Country Party Leader, Deputy Premier, Acting Premier, and member for Tenterfield, who was made a Companion of the Distinguished Service Order [DSO] for his service with the 6th Light Horse in Egypt in the First World War; John Markham Carter, former member of the Legislative Council, who was awarded the Military Cross [MC] for his service with the Light Horse; and Harold Fletcher White, former member of the Legislative Council, who was awarded Companion of the Distinguished Service Order [DSO] and Companion of the Order of St Michael and St George [CMG] for his service in the 33rd Battalion, Australian Imperial Force, in France and Flanders.

I also mention the former member for Oxley, George Dean Mitchell, whose meticulous diaries are a significant feature of the Australian War Museum and formed the basis of his book *Backs to the Wall*, which is a compelling read. I give credit to the member for Macquarie Fields for giving me the book, which I highly recommend as the most complete record by a soldier in the Great War who experienced virtually every battle from Gallipoli to the Western Front. He actively sought a Blighty to get out of there. He would even walk in the face of German machine guns because he believed he was invincible, until he ended up in this place as the member for Oxley, when fate caught up with him.

Today, 90 years after the merciful end of the Great War, at the eleventh hour of the eleventh day of the eleventh month we stood to remember those who have fallen for our great country. On behalf of The Nationals I join with the Premier and the Leader of the Opposition in remembering and honouring those servicemen and women who fought for our freedom in the Great War and subsequent conflicts. I know all members in this place pay particular tribute to William Matthew Currey, VC, and celebrate the re-dedication of the plaque in his memory just outside this Chamber in its rightful place in the Speaker's Square.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.56 p.m.]:

What passing-bells for these who die as cattle?
Only the monstrous anger of the guns.
Only the stuttering rifles' rapid rattle
Can patter out their hasty orisons.

Wilfred Owen wrote those famous words in his poem the *Anthem for Doomed Youth*. The bravery he then showed to enter the line again can only be guessed at. It puts to shame anything any of us in this place will ever have to face. On 4 November he was shot and killed near the village of Ors while crossing the Sambre River. The news of his death reached his parents home as the Armistice bells were ringing on 11 November 1918, 90 years ago today. By then, most of the Australians were out of the line; however, like Wilfred Owen, they

were in preparation for entering the line again. They were not to know that the war was about to end. For those who were there the firing of machine guns went on right until 11.00 a.m. when the guns suddenly stopped. Some Australian machine gunners were killed in the few days prior to the Armistice while fighting with British troops.

The Great War now resonates with our generation more than ever. Only one of those who were killed overseas has ever returned to Australia, that is, the Unknown Soldier buried in Canberra. The rest lie overseas. Their graves are all well tended. Those soldiers whose identities are known have personalised inscriptions of only a few words from their family—their graveyards scattered all over France and the rest of the world are a place of pilgrimage for all in this place. Australia lost 63,000 men, all volunteers, in the Great War. Like the rest of the world, we lost our innocence. The words of Menzies at the start of World War II that Australia was regrettably at war are testament to that.

For this extraordinarily high price we found our defining characteristics: mateship and irreverent equality. Those characteristics last in all of us to this day. Today we pause to remember those men, their courage and sacrifice, and we honour their memory in this place. We pause to respect the freedom that they fought for. William Matthew Currey inspires us with his bravery and few of us know if we ever could do the same. However, his honourable behaviour as a member of Parliament is something we all can aspire to and in doing so respect not only his memory but the memory of all who died. Lest we forget.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [6.00 p.m.]: An opportunity to speak of a fascination with World War I arrived today, which coincides with Armistice Day. One of my grandfathers served in the First World War and a great-grandfather suffered the same experiences as the grandfather of the Leader of The Nationals—he was gassed and had a lung removed. On his return from the war he was told that if he did not smoke or drink he would probably have a pretty fair life. But he did both, and lived to 96—so he did pretty well! I heard a lot of stories from my great-grandfather and my grandfather, who enlisted in the Victorian battalions. In my young life I had a fascination about World War I and the situation of the soldiers. Three brothers of my grandfather had enlisted. My grandfather decided that it would probably be a poor year on the property, so he went to a recruiting station in Melbourne.

He was a little under age. The recruiter said, "Walk around the block and when you get back you will be 19", which he did. There were many great stories to be told, but the one I recall most was about the greatest leader that Australia had, Pompey Elliot. In the hearts of the Victorians, Pompey was the man who put the Victorian battalions together and led them to Gallipoli. Pompey began life in a humble situation, on a farm in Charlton, Victoria, where he did it pretty tough. His father was a prospector and his mother was quite young when she married. As a young married lady she looked after the children and the farm and Pompey's father went to Western Australia and struck gold. That made him rich, so they moved to Ballarat. Subsequently Pompey Elliot received the education he deserved, and was an outstanding student and athlete. He achieved a law degree and later went to the Boer War. Although he then experienced war for the first time, he distinguished himself and went on to lead the Victorians to Gallipoli.

On the day he arrived in Gallipoli he was shot in the ankle. Although he tried to keep on keeping on, he was repatriated to Egypt. On recovering, which took some time, he rejoined his men. His men were awarded the greatest number of Victoria Crosses in a single battle for their actions in the battle of Lone Pine. Pompey later served in Europe in the tragic battle of Fromelles. He was always engaging with the British leaders, attacking them about their warfare methods, giving them his views. As he spent most of his time confronting the British leaders, he was overlooked in many promotions. Pompey had one belief: he said, "I will never put my men into a situation that I won't go into myself." He demonstrated that belief by being at the front with his troops. On many occasions he was seen on the front lines preparing his troops for attack. He was definitely a leader.

In 2002 Ross McMullin published a great book, *Pompey Elliot*, which I recommend to all members of Parliament. When I saw that book it rang a bell; it reminded me of that great leader, so I bought it. Ultimately Pompey Elliot was responsible for the success of the battle at Villers-Bretonneux. Despite what was written about in the history books, there is no doubt that Pompey was the man who ensured that that battle was a victory for the Allies. I tagged the page of the book that referred to Pompey speaking to his men at the end of the war when the battalions were disbanded. He said:

It has been the fashion in Australia to decry our own, but the men of the AIF will alter this when they return. You men have equalled the English Guards with their strict discipline; you have fought against the pick of the German Army, the Prussian Guard and the Wurtembergers; you have competed on the rifle range with the French Chasseurs Alpins—all with the same result. Think of these things when you go home. Have pride in yourself and in your country to determine, relying on yourself, to make your country the best to live in and die for. When we came to the Somme in March last year it seemed that there was nothing left

for us to do but just to die in our tracks in trying to stop the rush. But when we met the Germans in a really determined manner they did not have a chance with us at all. I thank you for your spontaneous token of respect. I am proud to think that over three years I have served with you, and have at times had to punish you, and yet I hold your respect. It is a great thing, and I thank you for this demonstration of your loyalty and your devotion.

I believe they are the words of a great man. He later served as a Senator in the Federal Parliament. He spent the remainder of his life supporting returned soldiers in their endeavours to get a fair go and repatriation after the war.

Mr PAUL GIBSON (Blacktown) [6.06 p.m.]: Remembrance Day is an important day that allows us to reflect on people who paid the ultimate price. They allowed us to live today in the finest country in the world. Without their efforts I am certain that that would not be the case. Remembrance Day allows us to honour the brave and the fallen, but it also gives us the opportunity to reflect on the legacies. Australia was the youngest nation to participate in World War I, and the cost was huge. The record of the Australian war dead states that 606 died in the Boer War, 6 in the Boxer Rebellion, 61,919 in World War I, 39,366 in World War II, 339 in the Korean war, 36 in the Malayan emergency, 15 in the Indonesian confrontation and 520 in the Vietnam War. Recently in Iraq there were losses, including a Special Air Service Regiment commando who was killed in a vehicle accident in Kuwait, and a soldier, Jacob Kovco, assigned to the Baghdad security detachment who died from the accidental discharge of his pistol.

They paid the supreme price so we can live the life we live. Today much has been said in the House about William Matthew Currey, VC, former member for Kogarah. It is wonderful that a commemorative plaque is to be erected in the Speaker's Square. His efforts and bravery have been well documented. He rushed the machine gun nests, secured the position and kept attacking, day after day, against the odds, time and time again. He showed bravery beyond the call. He was shot and gassed, but recovered, was awarded the Victoria Cross, and later became a member of Parliament in this Chamber.

I suppose today everyone has different thoughts about how they recall and reflect on Remembrance Day. I have often said that we do not teach enough Australian history in our schools. Americans are always talking about the Pilgrim Fathers and the *Mayflower*, and people such as Audie Murphy, Davy Crockett and now Barack Obama. We should be talking in our schools about the things that mean so much to us. When I go to a school I often ask whether the children know much about what happened during the First World War. Very little is taught about that. I think a lot more should be taught. I often ask about the Light Horse Brigade and they look at me. We have not told one of the greatest stories of this nation, which is that of the Light Horse Brigade.

It goes something like this: In 638 the Muslims took control of Jerusalem and held it for nearly 1,300 years. The young Aussie troops were first thrown into battle at Gallipoli and they ended up with bloody noses, as we know. Their next task was to see if they could liberate Jerusalem. The history of Jerusalem shows that that was virtually an impossible task. The Muslims had taken over in 638 and eventually Christians and Jews were not welcome. Over the years, 11 or 12 crusades tried to liberate Jerusalem. All attempts failed; they could not get through the Turks and into Jerusalem. In 1795 Napoleon tried. Napoleon is one of the greatest military brains of all time. He could not do it. He could not penetrate the Turkish lines and I suppose the sinking of his fleet by Nelson probably had a lot to do with his failure. The English then tried with 28,000 troops and cannons and tanks and they could not do it. In desperation they turned to the Aussies and said to the Light Horse Brigade, "Will you have a crack at it? We have tried many times and we can't get through."

It should be borne in mind that there were 4,500 Turks in the trenches. Behind them was wave after wave of barbed wire. Behind that was wave after wave of machine guns, and there were cannons behind them. They extended from Gaza to the wells at Beersheba. They were totally manned and nothing could get through. The authorities said to the Aussies with their slouch hats and emu feathers, "Can you have a crack at it?" Of course, typically of Aussies—hopefully we have the same spirit today—they said yes, they would have a crack at it. They charged. The Turks could not believe that anybody would be foolish enough to take them on head-on. Today it is history that not only did they get through Gaza and the wells of Beersheba, but they were the first into Jerusalem and liberated Jerusalem. They changed history forever.

As I said, 800 Aussies jumped on their horses—some of them scrawny horses—and charged into Beersheba and Jerusalem with the cannons, crossfire, machine guns, barbed wire and the 4,500 Turks in the trenches. Only 34 Aussies were killed in the charge. It has to go down as one of the greatest victories of all time, not only for Australia but also in the history of warfare. I have spoken about the Light Horse Brigade many times over the years in this Chamber and it is only right that we should talk about them. As I said before, this is one of the great stories. Any filmmaker would have to grab the story of the Light Horse Brigade. It would have

to be one of the greatest stories ever told, not only because it was a victory but also because it is a true story. It is an Australian story. It is one of the great Australian stories and something that should be repeated time and again in this Chamber.

On behalf of the people whom I represent in the electorate of Blacktown I today pay homage to all the people who fought in the war and those who lost their lives. It was a great cost to this nation and a great cost to the families. Families still hurt today because of their losses. One can imagine that. Without these people paying the great price they paid we would not have this wonderful country that we live in today. Today is the day to remember, and people such as the Victoria Cross winner from this Chamber and the Light Horse Brigade are very high on that honour roll.

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater) [6.14 p.m.]: I find Remembrance Day a difficult thing to talk about because war is not something to be celebrated but something to be remembered. Certainly a memory was sparked by the words of the member for Macquarie Fields when he mentioned that Wilfred Owen poem which has the phrase "the monstrous anger of the guns". It reminds me of a story I was told as a little boy by my grandmother who said that as a little girl living in the south of England she could hear the guns at night and would cry herself to sleep wondering if her brothers had been killed. Reflecting on that I remember her also telling me about Armistice Day. She was working as a secretary in Lloyd George's office and remembers walking out into The Mall and there being scenes of delirious joy that this war to end all wars was finally over.

War is a very difficult topic to talk about and many of us here have stories and memories of loved ones and ancestors who have fought. All of those shape us and in shaping us it is also reflective of the communities we serve, which are built up stories of people who have been damaged or affected in some way by war, particularly the First World War. I too would like to acknowledge the bravery of William Currey and also pay respects to all members of Parliament who have served in time of war. As the member for Pittwater I should mention one of my predecessors, Sir Robert Askin, who served in the Second World War under another member of Parliament, Lieutenant-Colonel Robson, who was the member for Vacluse. People on both sides of this place have served with distinction. Of course, two of them gave their lives in the First World War, Lieutenant-Colonel George Braund, from Armidale, and Sergeant Ted Larkin, from Willoughby. Both made the ultimate sacrifice.

I also endorse the placement of the plaque to commemorate the bravery of William Currey. Personal stories of courage, service and sacrifice remind us all and everyone who comes into this Parliament that Parliament is not above the people; it is constituted of the people. The experiences that members of Parliament have endured in time of war have been shared with other members of the community regardless of their profession. It is very important that we remember these personal stories of bravery and sacrifice because as Stalin once chillingly said: one death is a tragedy, one million deaths is a statistic. We must personalise these stories because otherwise the people become figures in a history book and they do not have meaningful stories behind them.

Behind every one of the more than 60,000 men who died in the First World War and each one of the 330,000 men and women who served in that war is a personal journey. Each is a breath that enlivens our connection not only to a tragic past but also to our society, our values and to our fragile yet endearing common humanity. Only if we continue to hear these accounts, these personal stories of human beings, can we truly give meaning to the phrase "lest we forget". It reminds me of another poet who was a bit like Wilfred Owen and had a change of heart because of his experience of war.

I refer to Rudyard Kipling, who was initially a defender of the Empire and ideas of conquest, but who changed as a result of the death of his son Jack. Rudyard Kipling's whole world crumbled with the death of his son. Having small children myself I can imagine what it must have done to him. It would rip a piece from you. It would be absolutely debilitating. He commented that after the First World War we had 40 million reasons for failure but not a single excuse. That reminds us again of personal stories that connect us to the past. As the First World War, in particular, fades in people's memories we need to keep these personal stories alive. A commemorative plaque is a way of giving a name to a horrible and awful conflict.

We must be mindful of the fact that Remembrance Day is not a day to recall only war, sacrifice and horror; it is also a day to remember the Armistice. That war came to an end and much of that sacrifice led to the peace that we enjoy in this country today. We might argue and debate with passion in this Chamber but we can walk outside the Chamber and chat with our colleagues who serve in different electorates, all facing similar

problems and challenges. We must give thanks for the peace that we enjoy but we must also be mindful of the fact that millions of others on this planet do not enjoy that privilege. It must not be forgotten that wars are occurring in other parts of the world.

Some people have said to me that, as parliamentarians, we have to make sacrifices, but I am reminded of parliamentarians in Afghanistan who are wandering around with a bounty on their heads merely because they serve as democratic representatives of the people. Australians are very lucky. Today we remember an extraordinary collection of people who have served as democratic representatives of the people—William Currey among them—and who continue to serve to keep this place a place of the people. We remember their collective suffering, their strength, their courage and their bravery, and we pray that future generations will never have to experience the scourge, horror, sadness and sacrifice of war.

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong) [6.21 p.m.]: I speak in debate on this appropriate motion relating to the deeds of William Matthew Currey, which have been fully outlined by the Leader of the House, Mr John Aquilina. I fully endorse all the words spoken by those who preceded me. It is appropriate that on this ninetieth anniversary of the commemoration of Remembrance Day we restore the plaque to the Speakers Square. Tonight I would like to focus on some other aspects of significance. Remembrance Day has particular significance for my family as my great-uncle—my grandfather's uncle—was killed during the First World War. According to Charles Bean, the official historian who was mentioned earlier this evening, Lieutenant Duncan Chapman of the 9th Battalion in Queensland, after whom my grandfather was named, was the first person ashore at Gallipoli. Over the years there has been some debate about the first person to land at Gallipoli. Lieutenant Duncan Chapman wrote to his family—my family has copies of that letter—and he said:

I happened to be in the first boat that reached the shore, and being in the bow at the time, I was the first man to get ashore.

One of his men later confirmed that and Charles Bean said it was most likely that he was the first person ashore. Recently a bust of Duncan Chapman was placed in a museum at Maryborough where he lived, and local schools teach students about his deeds on that day. After being promoted to major he was unfortunately killed at Pozieres on 6 August 1916. He died charging a machine gun emplacement in France. Every time either Anzac Day or Remembrance Day is commemorated family members spend some time thinking about his deeds and remembering his sacrifice for us all. Tonight I emphasise that members of our RSL sub-branches are getting older and they are finding it more difficult to march. Very few, if any, of World War I veterans are left and World War II veterans are rapidly ageing.

That was brought home to me recently when a group of World War II veterans who served as part of Norforce—the force that defended north Australia—met in my electorate. Austin Woodbury, a constituent of mine, lovingly restored a World War II jeep, even though he finds it difficult to walk these days. Current Norforce members collected that jeep for their museum. When they were relating stories about when they served in that region I was struck by the fact that Anzac Day and Remembrance Day are all about remembering the deeds of those who paid the ultimate sacrifice. However, those days also serve to bring people together to swap stories and to share that camaraderie now and into the future. At the afternoon tea on the day that they handed over the jeep, the original Norforce members who marched in the Anzac Day ceremony in Sydney handed over their regimental banner to serving officers—to the sergeant major and to the colonel—because they were no longer able to march and they wanted to ensure that their banner was still carried at Anzac Day ceremonies.

When they asked those two Army officers to carry the banner for them from now on I could see the emotion in the eyes of the two serving officers who accepted the banner. These people knew that they could no longer march but they wanted the history of their regiment to be remembered. I was struck by the fact that as servicemen get older and pass away, our youth and the future of our country remember their deeds in the future. Earlier the member for Blacktown said that schools did not teach enough about Australian history—Gallipoli, the Light Horse Brigade, and those sorts of things. When I was a school principal we took Anzac Day and Remembrance Day seriously, our ceremonies were formal, and lots of parents and members of the RSL attended them. Every child in the school completed a research project, a story, or a poem in remembrance of Anzac Day or Remembrance Day. The kids ran the assemblies and were diligent in remembering the importance of those ceremonies.

Anyone attending an Anzac Day or Remembrance Day ceremony would be amazed at the number of schoolchildren or young people from the Australian Air League or the Australian Army Cadets. Many young people wear their relatives' badges or medals, and some of them participate in the march to commemorate and remember family members. Today we remember those supreme sacrifices and we look forward to our young

people carrying on those traditions, preserving the memories, and remembering the sacrifices of men and women who gave their lives in service to our country. Those traditions and that spirit must be passed on. I hope that each year on 11 November people do not forget what that date represents. I hope that our young people, through our schools, through education, and through what is passed on by their parents, keep Anzac Day and Remembrance Day alive and ensure that these important days that commemorate the sacrifices of Australian men and women are remembered forever.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [6.28 p.m.]: I speak in debate on a motion that recognises that today is the ninetieth anniversary of the end of World War I. I acknowledge the bravery of the late William Currey and I endorse the Speaker's placing of his plaque in the Speakers Square. This morning I attended the Remembrance Day ceremony at the Cenotaph in Martin Place. On behalf of my electorate of Burrinjuck I was proud to place a wreath at the Cenotaph and to observe a minute's silence to respect our fallen soldiers. I pay respect to the family and friends of the late William Currey, a former member for Kogarah, and I also pay respect to his memory. I recognise the important role that he played in this place and for his nation. On Remembrance Day or Anzac Day we read stories that appear in local or major metropolitan newspapers about interesting characters that have taken part in our military history.

On the front page of today's *Sydney Morning Herald* I read about Joseph Crew in an article by Cynthia Banham entitled "Back to the front revisiting Fromelles and Villers-Bretonneux". He was Australia's first professional soldier to enlist in the Australian Imperial Force, in 1914 aged 34. He had to first resign from his job because the Australian Imperial Force was a volunteer Army at that stage, which I found quite remarkable. The article talks about his family and how his wife refused to believe that he had passed away in 1917 and never registered his name to be included on the Mosman cenotaph and memorial. Joseph Crew's name now has been added to that honour roll. His wife refused to believe he had died, obviously because she could not bear to think of losing someone she loved so much, who was a father to three children and one adopted child. It is a very sad story.

I think back to 2002 when the passing of Alec Campbell removed our last living link to the heroes of the Gallipoli campaign. I use the term "heroes" deliberately and do not denigrate anybody's memory because in our minds those who fought for our nation now have a status equivalent to Hercules, Ajax or any other classical Greek hero. Their individual and collective feats of courage and endurance is beyond question, but their heroism at the Gallipoli Peninsula was not unique to Gallipoli. We have all heard of Lone Pine, The Nek and Quinn's Post, but not so many of us are familiar with the names of Zeebrugge, Mont St Quentin or Jenin. Australians fought at these and many other forgotten places. Many of them sacrificed so much to protect our way of life and, ultimately, our system of parliamentary democracy. We most definitely owe them a great debt of gratitude. We must remember that throughout all of this the vast majority of soldiers were just very young men sent to do a terrible job.

Back in 2002 we saw the photographs of Alec Campbell as a 16-year-old soldier barely taller than the rifle he was carrying. Imagine the parliamentary inquiries and the grilling of our defence chiefs and political leaders if it were revealed that today in 2008 children of that age were being recruited to fight in Afghanistan or Iraq. During the battle at Isurava on the Kokoda Trail an understrength battalion of 350 militia troops exhausted from earlier fighting, ridden with malaria and on restricted rations held the village of Isurava against the repeated attacks of more than 6,000 crack Japanese jungle troops until relief arrived. That battle saw the loss of HMAS Yarra, which was sunk on 4 March 1942 while protecting a convoy against overwhelming odds.

Moving forward a few decades to the Vietnam War we were often bombarded with images of moratorium marches and the anti-Vietnam War movement. Many still hold strong views about whether Australia's participation in the Vietnam War was right: 496 Australians were killed in Vietnam and a further 2,308 were wounded. I do not believe anyone who has spoken to this motion—indeed, anyone in this place—would believe that the sacrifice of an 18-year-old Australian soldier was any different in 1968 than in 1915 or, indeed, in 2008: they answer the call of their government and put aside their daily lives to protect our way of life. Like the Vietnam moratorium movement, the debate about whether Australia would introduce conscription during the First World War also divided the nation. This led to two referenda and the expulsion of Prime Minister Hughes from the Labor Party on 15 September 1916.

Today the divisive nature of the debates of 1916 and 1917 are not recalled at remembrance ceremonies and remain the province of historians. I believe we should not dwell so much on the events of the past but, rather, on the results of those events and how they affect our lives today. In 1901 we became a nation at a time when our soldiers were serving in conflict overseas. During our centenary 100 years later soldiers still served

overseas in the Persian Gulf, East Timor and later in Afghanistan. With the recent focus on Iraq perhaps it is appropriate during this motion to look also at the RSL, the events that shaped it as an organisation and how the league is perceived today.

The Leader of the Opposition spoke very highly of the Returned Services League and recognised its long and proud history: a history almost as long as the nation it serves. The idea of an association of returned servicemen was first raised in June 1916, and by March 1918 all Australian States were represented in the league. Several name changes occurred until the trademark initials RSL finally emerged in October 1965. However, some things have not changed. From its inception in 1916 the league has remained true to the twin pillars it espoused in 1916: mateship and nationalism. It is very rare for any discussion on what it means to be an Australian to take place without referring to the sacrifices made and the mateship developed during the Gallipoli campaign.

In small country towns where the bank, service station, pub and even the post office have closed—which has happened throughout many towns and villages in rural New South Wales, not the least of which is in my electorate of Burrinjuck—one is almost certain to find a small cenotaph, memorial scroll or honour roll commemorating these sacrifices. It was the returned service men and women who built these memorials. For the past 90 years the RSL has fostered the development and commemoration of Remembrance Day and Anzac Day, and has nurtured and developed this important aspect of our national identity. During those years the RSL was not a stranger to controversy and strife.

A divisive and bitterly contested issue between the end of the First World War and 1983 was whether membership of the league should be restricted to returned servicemen. Thankfully, like the Good Friday riots of 1915 and the World War I conscription debates, that facet of the league's history has been relegated to a footnote on a history page. But I remember clearly throughout my school years the continued argument as to whether people other than returned service men and women should be allowed to participate in the marches. In following the contribution of the member for Wyong to this motion, I am pleased to say that many schoolchildren are told that they should take part in Remembrance Day ceremonies and Anzac Day marches. I totally encourage and highly recommend to all schools that a compulsory part of the school year should be to attend Anzac Day and Remembrance Day ceremonies.

The RSL remains the strongest voluntary association in Australia with an unmatched reach into nearly every community. The past century was a turbulent period in the history of the world. One could count on both hands the number of nations that survived that 100-year period with their system of government unchanged. Fortunately, Australia was one of those nations. We should all be profoundly grateful for our system of government and the freedoms we enjoy; freedoms that have been won and defended at such terrible cost; freedoms that have been and are guaranteed by past and serving members of the defence forces. Members of the RSL about whom we have spoken represent a unique type of person, the sort of person who says, "I will sacrifice my personal freedoms, I will sacrifice my comfort, I will go into harm's way to defend my country." Having served their country in uniform they continue to serve their country today.

The RSL remains a strong voice for traditional conservative values—values I share and hold dear. The RSL also has been an ardent and continuing advocate of a strong defence force, and supports serving members of the Australian Defence Force, including the reserves. Through its support of veterans and their families the RSL has shown strong advocacy for traditional family values. Through its youth programs and support for a cadet force, the RSL displays its faith in the future of our nation.

My father-in-law, John Seeck, put up his age to fight in World War I. Just like Currey, he could not wait to enlist and serve his country. He enlisted and went off to fight in the Great War. He was hit with shrapnel and ended up with a steel plate in his head. After he returned to South Australia he moved to Victoria and then to New South Wales. He fathered 16 children, four with his first wife and 12 with his second wife. My husband is the second youngest of those 12 children. John Seeck died in 1971. He is just another example of a man, a great Australian with an amazing story, which I will tell at another time. John Seeck is a classic Australian example of a very young man putting up his age to go to war in aid of his nation.

We must always remember that war is terrible and destructive. It is not glamorous, as a young John Seeck might have imagined it would be. Armed conflict is devastating. Those who have been touched by it are affected physically and emotionally as well as spiritually. During the last century more than 100,000 Australians gave their lives, and many hundreds of thousands more have been wounded, incapacitated or afflicted in defence of our freedoms. Those who served left these shores in the belief and hope that if they had to offer their lives, it would be in the service of something greater than themselves.

We should never forget that the freedoms that we enjoy today have been secured at a terrible cost. We should never forget or fail to hold in honour their sacrifice. In my electorate of Burrinjuck there are people who are currently serving in the defence forces or who have returned from armed conflict and participation in peacekeeping missions. They have worked in differing ways to build peace and to bring justice. They are entitled to our enduring gratitude. They deserve to be remembered. In Kohima, Burma, there is a memorial to the 2nd Infantry Division bearing an inscription by John Maxwell Edmonds. That inscription appears on many memorials throughout the world:

When You Go Home, Tell Them Of Us And Say,
For Their Tomorrow, We Gave Our Today

Lest we forget.

Mrs KARYN PALUZZANO (Penrith—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.40 p.m.]: It is with pleasure that I participate in commemorating the war service of William Currey and in marking the dedication to his memory of a plaque in the Speakers Square. In common with other members of the House, in my electorate, Remembrance Day is significant to many of my constituents as well as to their families and friends. I pay tribute to the schools in the Penrith electorate that participated in Remembrance Day. Some schools chose other days on which to commemorate the sacrifice of Australian service personnel. Last week I attended a commemorative ceremony at Blaxland High School that was conducted by the school leadership group. It was an excellent tribute to Remembrance Day. The presentation included music and a PowerPoint presentation of visual images of the conflict of 1914 to 1919, but featured handwritten notes of a soldier to his wife and a letter informing the wife of how and when the soldier had been killed in action. The notes formed a link between conflict of the past to the commemorative ceremony conducted by students at the Blaxland High School last week.

I commend the principal, Keith Miles, and all students for their sensitive commemoration ceremony. Representatives of sub-branches of the RSL from Springwood, Blaxland and Penrith as well as members of the Blue Mountains group of the Vietnam Veterans Association attended the school's Remembrance Day ceremony. The Penrith RSL Sub-branch made a fitting tribute to Remembrance Day by redesigning Memory Park. We all know that there are many Memory Parks and honour rolls throughout New South Wales, and Penrith is no exception. In 1922, eight tablets were fixed to a rotunda. Through finance made available by the Penrith Girls Comfort Club, the tablets were affixed to brick walls. The first tablet bears the original plaque that was dedicated by the then Governor of New South Wales, His Excellency Sir Walter Davidson, on 8 July 1922.

This year, the Penrith RSL Sub-Branch commemorated the ninetieth anniversary of the dedication of the plaque by rededicating the honour roll and totally changing Memory Park. The motivation for the change has been the number of young people and families who are attending the Anzac Day Dawn Service, the Anzac Day marches and the Remembrance Day events. Members of the sub-branch raised funds over a number of years so that the honour rolls could be moved to a park befitting such a significant memorial. The war memorial was rededicated on 31 October, to mark the anniversary of the Battle of Beersheba 1917, and the current Governor of New South Wales, Professor Marie Bashir, performed the ceremony. It is fitting that a previous Governor of New South Wales, Sir Walter Davidson, dedicated the first plaque and that the rededication ceremony was performed by our current Governor.

The Governor's speech not only dedicated the memorial but also referred to the significance of young people in attendance. Her Excellency sought the endorsement from the young people in attendance of their becoming custodians of the memorial. A number of returned servicemen attended the rededication ceremony, including representatives from the Royal Australian Air Force, the Army, and the Navy as well as returned service personnel who fought in the Vietnam War. The Governor spoke particularly to the students in attendance and encouraged them to take an interest in the memorial so that in future it will be looked after in a manner befitting its significance. It should be noted that the memorial was designed by a local sculptor, Terrance Plowright, and took seven months to construct. The memorial features stainless steel representing a flame, and at night-time it looks as though it is alight. Behind the stainless steel flame, on a large rectangular plinth, there are four casts representing the Army, the Navy, the Air Force and nursing. That provides a backdrop on a sandstone frame. The memorial is quite large and takes up almost a third of the width of the park. It is pleasing that it was designed and constructed by a local resident with cooperation and support from various sub-branches of the RSL as well as from the Penrith City Council.

Laurie Tucker and his team undertook fundraising to create the new war memorial that we are proud to acknowledge now graces Memory Park. The honour roll lists those who served from 1914 to 1919, and the first plaque honours all the young boys from the Penrith area who lost their lives. As other members have pointed

out, similar plaques honour many thousands of young men who volunteered but did not return, and Penrith is no different. Of the eight tablets, the sixth lists the names of 10 nurses from the Penrith district who served overseas between 1914 and 1918, one of whom was Adelaide Maud Kellett. Although there are quite a number of names listed on the honour roll, I draw attention in particular to Stanley Colless, who was born on 19 November 1892 in Penrith. He died on 1 September 1918 at Peronne in France. His service was recognised by the Award of Valour. Stanley Colless was mentioned in dispatches by his commanding officer, who wrote:

Sergeant Colless doing good work—my officers also of course. Would like you to say something to his man, he is doing splendid work.

Stanley Colless's efforts were recorded in the *Nepean Times* in 1916 and 1917. He attracted the newspaper's attention not only because he was a local boy who had volunteered but also because of his award. On 16 September 1916, the *Nepean Times* stated:

Word has been received by the parents of Lieut. Stan Colless (viz., Mr and Mrs H Colless of North Street, Penrith) that their gallant son has been awarded the D. C. M. for gallantry in action during recent operations on the Western Front. Lieut. Colless, who had been promoted to his present rank on the field from that of Sergeant-Major, enlisted some 16 months ago, and since leaving for the seat of war has seen much service both in Egypt and France. That he would comport himself with true Australian valour was never doubted by his many friends at Penrith, who, while delighted at his obtaining the prized D. C. M., are not really surprised that one of the grit and resolution of Stan. Colless had gained such deserved distinction.

The *Nepean Times* of 10 February 1917 noted:

Mr and Mrs H Colless ... have received from their gallant son (Lieut. Stan Colless) the D.C.M. medal awarded him by the King for conspicuous valor on the field of battle ... and for which act of gallantry the recipient—then Sergeant—was promoted to the rank of Lieutenant ...

Lieutenant Colless was mentioned in the *Nepean Times* of 16 March 1918 for his actions during his time as a soldier. The *Nepean Times* of 21 September 1918 stated:

Fallen Heroes: Lieut. Stanley Colless, DCM, MC: The war continues to take its toll of victims from amongst the brave lads of this district who entered the ranks in defence of the Empire's freedom and liberties. The list continues to steadily grow, and already many of the best and most promising of our young manhood have paid the supreme penalty. This week it is again our painful duty to add further to the long list, and we feel sure the deepest sympathy of the public is with the bereaved relatives of the fallen soldiers—Lieutenant Stanley Colless, DCM, MC, Sgt Frank Abbott, and Corporal Henry John (Jack) Burrows.

The three soldiers were members of the Church of England, and the news of their death was sent through Rev N M Lloyd (acting Rector of St Stephens). News of Lieutenant Colless' death came through on Thursday, and Sgt Abbott's and Corporal Burrows' on Saturday. Out of respect for the three men, who have given their lives that we here in Australia may live in peace and comfort ...

I acknowledge that not only young men from the district served between 1914 and 1918, a number of nurses also served. Adelaide Maud Kellett was in the Australian Army Nursing Service. She was awarded the CBE and the RRC. She was born on 1 September 1873 at Raglan, New South Wales, and was the daughter of Charles Henry and Sarah Kellett. In January 1898 Kellett entered Sydney Hospital as a probationer, and was granted her nursing certificate in September 1901. In May 1908 Kellett joined the Australian Army Nursing Service. This was a voluntary position with a requirement that a specified number of hours of lectures, et cetera, would be attended each year. In October 1910 Kellett was appointed assistant to Rose Creal, the matron of Sydney Hospital.

Kellett joined the Australian Imperial Forces in September 1914 as a nursing sister. On 15 October 1914 Kellett, a member of the first nursing contingent, left Australia aboard the *Euripedes* and served as a theatre sister aboard this transport ship. She stopped briefly at Colombo and then went on. In September Kellett was appointed to the hospital ship *Gascon*, which was used to transport the wounded from Gallipoli to Lemnos. She described the trip to Gallipoli as follows:

Our orders arrived to proceed to Anzac Cove, which we reached the same evening, about six hours trip from Mudros Harbour ... our patients began to arrive about 6 pm, in barges, mostly medical cases ... I feared from the terrible firing, especially about 3 am, there would not be a single soul alive, and was greatly relieved and surprised in the morning, when the barges arrived, to find so few wounded. Left Anzac Cove on the night of the 12th of September 1915, reaching Mudros harbour early the next morning, put some of our patients ashore, and received our orders for Malta.

In 1916 Kellett went to Choubra Military Infectious Hospital, a semi-private Austro-Hungarian hospital prior to the outbreak of World War I, which contained 400 beds. The facility handled infectious cases such as diphtheria, typhoid, cerebro-spinal meningitis, mumps, measles and dysentery. She was in charge of a number of sisters there. She was also given a distinguished award. The *Nepean Times* of 2 June 1916 acknowledged:

The many friends of Matron A M Kellett (daughter of Mrs Kellett of High Street, Penrith) who is now in charge of Marylebone Palace Military Hospital, England, will learn with patriotic pride and pleasure that Matron Kellett was awarded the Royal Red Cross (1st class) by the hands of the King at Buckingham Palace on 6th April.

Matron Kellett was on holiday in Ireland and was summoned to return to present herself to Buckingham Palace on the date noted to receive the coveted award. The *Nepean Times* further stated:

The Royal Red Cross (awarded to nurses) is the equivalent to the V. C. The conferring of this distinguished award stated by hand of the King on Miss Kellett, is by the way, extremely pleasing to the public of Penrith and district, as Matron Kellett is a native of the town, and in her girlhood attended the Penrith Superior Public School, at which many of the present generation were her confreres. The congratulations of the citizens will be extended to Mrs Kellett in relation to her esteemed daughter's merited distinction.

It is fitting that today I acknowledge these two young people, one of whom did not come home, and the other, Adelaide Maud Kellett, who did come home and retired many years later from the position of matron of Sydney Hospital. I also pay tribute to those men and women serving in the defence forces. Penrith has had strong links to the defence forces. We still have an Army presence, a RAAF presence at Lapstone and Glenbrook, and a Navy presence at Orchid Hills. I acknowledge family members who have served in military campaigns. I have two great-uncles who were in the Navy: Albert Burley and Robert Burley. It is interesting to note that, like many others, Albert Burley went to Victoria to enlist in the Victorian Navy as he was underage.

My father spent 32 years in the Royal Australian Air Force and retired as a warrant officer. He served in the Malaysian campaign. Today is Remembrance Day. In New South Wales and throughout Australia we have many people from many lands. Post World War II and many conflicts, Australia has opened its arms to refugees from around the world, and is still doing so. I refer to those who now reside in New South Wales and in Penrith in particular who have served in conflicts but may have served as members of the Japanese forces, the German forces, or the Italian forces. Many returned service men and women may have been in opposing forces in times of conflict.

I pay my respects to two men from Penrith. One is my husband's father, Carlo Paluzzano, who was in the Alpini corps from Udinese in Italy. Anyone who knows of the Alpini corps during World War II knows that it went to the Russian Front. Many thousands went to the Russian Front but only a handful returned. Carlo Paluzzano was one of the few who returned, but he did not survive for long after migrating to Australia and the birth of my husband. Livio Nassivera, who is my husband's stepfather and my father-in-law, turned 88 last Saturday. He spent six of his 88 years in North Africa as a prisoner of war. He used that time diligently by learning English and French, establishing a school and teaching maths. The prisoners educated one another and had market gardens. He also migrated to Australia soon after the war.

Livio came from Forni di Sotto, which is in the Alps of northern Italy. Those who know the terrain of northern Italy would know that not many towns survived during World War II. Livio's town did not survive. What did survive was a fountain but not much else. The churches and houses had to be rebuilt. He decided not to stay and migrated to Australia. He moved from the north of Italy to Bourke in Australia. He worked two years in the abattoirs and then came to Sydney and spent the rest of his time with Sydney Water. He constructed the Warragamba Dam. I pay my respects to all those returned service men and women and to those who are still serving in the defence forces. I acknowledge that William Currey, former member for Kogarah, is acknowledged in the Speaker's Square with a fitting rededication of a memorial.

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

REPORT OF AN INVESTIGATION INTO A COMPLAINT AGAINST THE HONOURABLE A. P. STEWART, MP

Personal Explanation

Mr TONY STEWART, by leave: I wish to make a personal explanation resulting from a report of an investigation into allegations about my conduct at a Garvan Institute function held on 22 October 2008. I give this explanation with full knowledge and understanding that anything I say in this House which is misleading could result in my removal as a member of Parliament. In this context, I invite any scrutiny through the judicial process, the Independent Commission Against Corruption or any public forum on the validity of the comments that I make. Earlier today the Premier requested that I resign from my position as Minister. I refused to do so on the basis that I firmly believe that the report commissioned by the Premier, undertaken by Ms Chris Ronalds, SC, is a denial of natural justice and due process has not been followed.

I consider the report is subjective and based on hearsay evidence. The report is deficient because it contains no statements from people present at the function where the alleged behaviour occurred which would

corroborate Ms Sanger's version of events. I have instructed by legal advisers to pursue action and have the report and its conclusions judicially reviewed. I wish to state plainly and clearly that the allegations made about me by Ms Tina Sanger in respect to the Garvan Institute function and associated issues are not true, other than we did have a brief amicable discussion, at Ms Sanger's instigation, on work roles. At no stage before, during or after the subject Garvan function did I shout at, raise my voice or touch Ms Sanger, nor did I speak to Ms Sanger in a manner that can be described as rude, dismissive or belittling.

At this subject function Ms Sanger was in good spirits throughout the entire evening and displayed absolutely no signs of anxiety or concern, nor did she cry at any stage or show any form of distressed emotion or behaviour. There were some 600 people at this function, including 10 people sitting at my table. I am not aware of any evidence from any of those people which supports Ms Sanger's versions of events. Indeed, one of the guests sitting immediately next to Ms Sanger has sent me an unsolicited email in which she states:

I am writing [to you] to say how sorry and confused I am over this weeks media reports. You probably don't [know] ... me by name, however, I was at the dinner with Johanna Griggs and was seated at the table for about 95% of the evening and certainly did not witness anything untoward. Both Johanna and I enjoyed meeting [with] you ... we wish you all the best.

That is from Susan Muggleton, manager of Johanna Griggs, who was seated next to Tina Sanger. In this context, I remain bewildered that this complaint has even arisen, and surprised that Ms Chris Ronald, SC, would make the finding that she has made, and I am deeply disappointed in the Premier's decision on this matter.

PORTS AND MARITIME ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT (PORT COMPETITION AND CO-ORDINATION) BILL 2008

Message received from the Legislative Council returning the bill with an amendment.

Consideration of Legislative Council's amendment set down as an order of the day for a future day.

HOMELESSNESS

Matter of Public Importance

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [7.05 p.m.]: Homelessness in New South Wales is a huge concern. In 1996 Emiritus Professor Ian Webster said, "I get more pleasure talking to a homeless person than a business executive ... there is no artificiality and no falsehoods." Professor Webster is truly a good friend to those in need and many of those people are homeless, and to mention him is a good way to begin a discussion on homelessness in New South Wales. He has worked with many people down on their luck and in poverty and one of the main sites of his focus has been and remains Matthew Talbot Hostel for homeless men, not very far from this place. The issue of homelessness has long been a great interest of mine in relation to the reasons why people today are homeless and how to provide solutions—because there is not just one but many avenues to meet the needs of those who find themselves without accommodation—and how to keep those who choose to move into four walls and a roof in housing.

The homeless in New South Wales are some of the most vulnerable people in our society by virtue of the fact they have no safe haven but mostly because of the makeup of the homeless population. My abiding interest in the homeless in our community has led me to look within my own community. I have many homeless in the Hornsby electorate. It has led me to look at Sydney, the entire State of New South Wales, interstate and overseas. I look for answers. The sad part about this is that despite government, wonderful non-government organisations and church groups, the homeless are still increasing in numbers, as are the services that they require. This is in the face of massive budget windfalls and an economic upturn over a number of years. All agencies I speak to describe a burgeoning increase in homelessness and associated needs.

Homelessness is a social and economic problem that has implications for a wide range of fields including, but not confined to, housing, health and community services. Despite many separate and sometimes connected attempts to solve the problem of homelessness it remains a difficult issue. In the electorate of Hornsby we have hundreds, some say 600, homeless people. The fact that I cannot be specific about a number is because the homeless are impossible to accurately count. It is alarming to note at this point that the regional office of the Department of Housing was unaware of the existence of homeless people in my area until I informed them one year ago. What of planning to improve the lot of the homeless if the Government has failed to acknowledge their very presence?

This year, I was indeed fortunate to have an intern, Aimee Cornelius, from the University of Technology, Sydney who undertook an extensive study of homelessness and produced a report to which I will refer. This report informs us not only of issues associated with homelessness in New South Wales but also local, national and international homelessness. In an attempt to solve problems around our State issues, we must look at small areas as well as larger communities. Metropolitan issues arising out of homelessness will differ from rural and regional by virtue of available services. Anecdotally, homeless people are often very mobile and will migrate to areas where they can access services that they need. This may not always be a roof over their head. I refer to the report of Aimee Cornelius where the definition of homelessness is:

There are two definitions most used in referring to homelessness in Australia. The first definition is the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) Act which defines homelessness as:

For the purposes of this Act, a person is homeless if, and only if, he or she has inadequate access to safe and secure housing. For the purposes of this Act, a person is taken to have inadequate access to safe and secure housing if the only housing to which the person has access: a) damages, or is likely to damage, the person's health; or b) threatens the person's safety; or c) marginalises the person through failing to provide access to: i) adequate personal amenities; or ii) the economic and social supports that a home normally affords; or d) places the person in circumstances which threaten or adversely affect the adequacy, safety, security and affordability of that housing.

The second definition is more of a cultural explanation of homelessness developed by Chamberlain and McKenzie and describes three forms of homelessness: primary, secondary and tertiary homelessness. Primary homelessness is described as "people without convention accommodation: living on the streets, in deserted buildings, in cars, under bridges, in improvised dwellings" and more. Secondary homelessness is explained as "people moving between various forms of temporary shelter, including friends, relatives, emergency accommodation and boarding houses." The third category of homelessness, tertiary, is described as "people living in single rooms in private boarding houses on a long-term basis: without their own bathroom, kitchen or security of tenure."

The Australian Bureau of Statistics [ABS] has just released data on the homeless in Australia stating that there are approximately 105,000 homeless people in our communities. In New South Wales the number is estimated to be more than 27,000. An analysis of ABS categories shows that homeless families rose from 22,944 in 2001 to 26,790—10,608 parents and 16,182 children. In 2006, families represented 26 per cent of the homeless population. Males were represented more than females, by 56 per cent to 44 per cent. Indigenous people are 9 per cent of the homeless.

I am of the firm belief that youth homelessness is unique, and needs very special consideration. My colleague the member for Manly will address those specifics. My earliest association with homeless people came about when I was completing my General Nurse Training at the Royal North Shore Hospital and a number of homeless people were admitted into the Accident and Emergency Department and the wards. The next close association was when I was with the Australian Podiatry Association and assisted in setting up a podiatry clinic at the Matthew Talbot Hostel for homeless men. The needs of the homeless became crystal clear for me then.

As members of Parliament we are all familiar with homelessness in some form, as there are homeless people in most electorates. The Government's efforts to combat the rising tide of homelessness include projects such as the Inner City Homelessness Action Plan, which brings together 11 government agencies and programs including the Supported Accommodation Assistance Plan. Unfortunately, the provision of services does not nearly meet the needs of the homeless.

A number of organisations, non-government and church groups, work tirelessly to attempt to meet the needs of the homeless. In my area the Salvation Army has 266 open files for homeless people, and the St Vincent de Paul Society has well over 200 open files. Many other organisations offer meals, vouchers and assistance to find scarce accommodation. Recently the Wesley Mission sent representatives to State Parliament to request members of Parliament to comment on its July 2008 report, entitled "More than a bed: Sydney's homeless speak out". Superintendent Keith Garner pointed out in his address that all of us are only two steps away from an event that would result in homelessness. He also said homelessness has the following components—housing, finances/debt and relationships. Most homeless have joint issues—alcohol, drugs, mental illness, domestic violence, physical disability, childhood abuse, gambling, severe trauma. Taking drugs and/or alcohol is usually to provide relief of pain or symptoms—for example, those of mental illness which are predominant among the homeless.

Mr PAUL PEARCE (Coogee) [7:12 p.m.]: Homelessness is a national challenge and we all have a responsibility to help those most vulnerable in our communities. It is important to note that in this debate we are dealing with the results of a decade of neglect by the former Howard Government, which cut \$1 billion out of

the sector, making it extremely difficult to provide top-level services. The obscenity of the previous Federal Government's performance is typical of its denial of human rights in a number of areas. It failed to perform in accordance with its international obligations. The fundamental human right to adequate housing is recognised under Article 25 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The International Covenant on Economic Social and Cultural Rights, to which Australia is a signatory, in Article 11 recognises that right. In a developed nation such as Australia, this is an absolute right not a relative or contingent right.

There is no doubt that Sydney is Australia's most expensive city and housing affordability is a significant factor in people becoming homeless. Both the Prime Minister and the Premier have made homelessness a priority and our Minister for Housing, David Borger, is also committed to addressing this growing problem. Minister Borger lived in public housing as a child and also worked for Hope Hostel, a shelter for homeless men in Parramatta, so he understands firsthand the emotion and challenges people face in the housing sector. Homeless people are among the most vulnerable in our society and their needs are very complex. Homeless people's lives can often be very chaotic and their way of life, by its very nature, is transient. This can create challenges in how to assist with the right services to help them maintain a tenancy.

In the past financial year, approximately 35 per cent of all priority applicants housed were homeless and about 40 per cent of new long-term leases of community housing were to homeless people. This represents over 1,300 households. The Government is committed to continuing to help people facing homelessness and we are working with the community sector and all levels of government, including local government, to address this important issue.

The New South Wales Government, along with other State and Territory jurisdictions, is in negotiation with the Commonwealth Government. The National Affordable Housing Agreement and the Commonwealth's white paper will help set the directions for addressing homelessness at the national level. At the State level, the Government is in the process of developing a homelessness strategic framework for New South Wales that will, in the context of the national developments, set key directions for addressing homelessness in this State. A cross-agency working group in consultation with key stakeholders is developing the New South Wales framework. In August and September this year, consultations were held around the State on the draft framework with government and non-government service providers and homeless people.

The advice gained through those consultations is critical to finalising the strategic directions of the framework and to developing actions that even better coordinate this Government's efforts to prevent and address homelessness. A key component of the framework will be to better coordinate support services to help people who have been homeless to maintain their tenancies through the Human Services Accord with the New South Wales human service agencies. Development of the New South Wales homelessness strategic framework will also build on the successes of the New South Wales Partnership Against Homelessness, a partnership of 12 New South Wales government agencies with Housing New South Wales as the lead agency.

The partnership has operated since 1999 and has overseen the development of a variety of successful initiatives including those being progressed under the Inner City Homelessness Action Plan, referred to by the member for Hornsby. The Inner City Homelessness Action Plan was developed in 2002 to address the needs of homeless people sleeping rough in the inner-city suburbs of Sydney. It provides suitable housing and support to assist people who have been homeless with the transition to long-term accommodation. Another great initiative under the action plan is My Place. Under that initiative, funding is provided for 60 private rental leases that are linked to outreach support for homeless men and women. A review of the My Place Homeless Lease Initiative showed that 90 per cent of supported clients succeeded in sustaining a tenancy with 66 per cent of clients sustaining their tenancies for longer than 12 months.

The New South Wales Government through Housing New South Wales also provides temporary accommodation for people who are homeless or in housing crisis while they make longer term arrangements. In the past financial year, more than 27,500 nights of accommodation were provided through that program. There is a temporary accommodation hotline through the Housing Contact Centre. Homeless people or those at risk of homelessness can call the hotline after hours and on weekends and the department will book accommodation at a local hostel or motel, until they can get themselves to a Housing New South Wales office for further assistance.

Because people with a mental illness are at greater risk of homelessness, Housing New South Wales works closely with New South Wales Health on a variety of initiatives that link stable accommodation to support. Housing New South Wales is actively involved in the Housing and Accommodation Support Initiative

and the joint guarantee of service for people with mental health problems and disorders. Both initiatives aim to ensure that people with mental health issues and disorders have access to appropriate accommodation and support services to assist them to sustain their accommodation in the longer term. The New South Wales Government is leading the way in trialling products to make sure vulnerable people find and stay in private market tenancies. This includes the Private Rental Brokerage Service, which helps homeless people with complex needs find accommodation and sustain private market tenancies.

Also the tenancy guarantees provide landlords with \$1,000 against damage or arrears to encourage them to grant tenancies to people who would otherwise find it difficult to compete for tenancies in the private market. In 2007-08, the Government committed \$26.4 million and helped more than 51,033 people through that program. It is a sad but true fact that 12- to 25-year-olds are most at risk of homelessness. We are actively working to support young people and to help them access support services that assist with education, training and employment. Just one example is the Hunter Signpost Homelessness Assessment and Referral Service, which I will not detail. It provides assessment, referral and case management to people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness.

Homelessness also affects people in rural and regional areas. We have seen the signs of this in the significant numbers of people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness in regional New South Wales. For example, Newcastle has relatively high numbers of homeless people, and the Hunter Signpost Assessment and Referral Service is jointly funded by Housing New South Wales and the Department of Community Services to provide a first point of contact. The examples of the programs in place that I have cited are impressive and demonstrate a commitment to confront and address this significant problem. Does more need to be done? Absolutely. Only government has the obligation and the resources to address this pressing social need. Those who argue that the private sector can deliver in this area are at best deluded. There is no profit to be made from addressing chronic homelessness, but there is an absolute moral obligation on our society to provide for this very basic need of our fellow citizens. I thank the member for Hornsby for bringing this important matter to the attention of the House.

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly) [7.19 p.m.]: I too pay tribute to the member for Hornsby. Her work and passion for those who are mentally ill and those who are homeless are an inspiration to me and should be an inspiration to everyone in New South Wales. I congratulate her on bringing forward this matter of public importance. It is ironic that in the gallery tonight we have every parent's dream—kids who are the captains of their schools and who represent the leadership not just of their community in Manly, but potentially the leadership of the entire State. Not everyone is so lucky. Every night 11,000 kids between 12 and 18 years are homeless in New South Wales—they have no roof over their heads. I ask myself why am I in this place? Why do I want to be in this Parliament? First and foremost, I want to make a difference for the Manly electorate community that I love and represent with great pride. I am committed to the 11,000 kids who, day in and day out, do not have a home. If we can make a difference in their lives, our time here will be worthwhile.

The Premier has declared his commitment to address homelessness, and we applaud that. We do not just want words; we want action. Last month the Government introduced the Children (Criminal Proceedings) Amendment (Youth Conduct Orders) Bill to provide multiagency coordination between youth services. However, it was just a pilot program. We need action. Children across the State deserve far greater support than they are currently getting. In this journey I met Paul Moulds, who runs Oasis in Surry Hills. He is testimony to the silent heroes in our community. Day in and day out he goes out onto the street and builds relationships with some of these kids, asking them whether they want to move up, whether they want to get off the drugs. If they do, he is there to help them. What he said to me has stuck with me. He said:

Behind these kids' pain and family problems, behind the drugs and often associated mental illness ... is a beautiful human being.

That is what he sees in these kids. Unfortunately, society sees the problems, not the beautiful human behind them. Last month the New South Wales Coalition held a summit on youth homelessness. Since the Burdekin report 20 years ago the problem has only worsened. Tangible changes must be made. At our summit 40 experts worked together and we came up with recommendations and plans for the State Government to adopt to start to make a difference. Some experts at the summit said that counsellors are needed in every New South Wales school to enable early intervention. We need to co-locate services to improve access for youth who do not go from place to place to seek help. Odyssey House found that each person had been in contact with 12 different services before they went to Odyssey House. The summit also found that caseworkers must work across government departments; that we need to look at tax incentives for landlords, mentoring programs for young

people by young people, as well as employment opportunities. We are pleased that, in response to this initiative by the member for Hornsby, the Minister for Youth has agreed to hold a statewide summit. We applaud the Minister for taking it on so that once and for all the State Government will take youth homelessness seriously.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [7.22 p.m.], in reply: I thank members for making valuable contributions to this debate. This year has highlighted the issue of homelessness. The Prime Minister's green paper has been released but we are still waiting for the white paper. A number of people have expressed concern about the green paper being limited in scope, so we hope that the white paper has the answers. We had a visit from Phillip Mangano, Executive Director of the United States Interagency Council on Homelessness. He came this year as a guest of the Schizophrenia Fellowship and spoke to members of Parliament as well as completing his other responsibilities. His main message, apart from the 10-year plan that is underway in the United States of America, is that when homeless people were asked whether having a house was a main priority in turning their lives around, 85 per cent said that was the main priority; that if they had somewhere to live, that would make a big difference and would be their step forward into a rosier future. We know that follow-up services must also be provided.

Therese Rein, the Prime Minister's wife, has a close association with the interagency and she has also accepted being the patron of Common Ground Australia. There are models such as Common Ground in South Australia, and I hope to visit Adelaide soon. Victoria has just adopted Common Ground and that will be an exciting project for the future. Premier Rees has given a strong commitment to Common Ground in New South Wales. This is commendable, but the agencies responsible for turning this into reality do not have a budget. I am very concerned, given what we have heard in the mini-budget today, about whether there is a continuing commitment to funding Common Ground. Is there commitment behind the words the Premier spoke only a few weeks ago, that he will put serious money into something that is so essential? I refer to *An Investigation into Homelessness*, written in October 2008 by intern Aimee Cornelius, in which she states:

It is of importance to note that homelessness is not a specific priority action in the NSW Government's State Plan. *Responding to Homelessness*, the NSW Auditor General's Report, determined that there are also no statewide performance measures or targets on homelessness and that therefore it cannot be determined how successfully the NSW government is responding to homelessness. The reported 27,374 homeless people in NSW as counted at the 2006 Census deserve a more assertive government response that is committed to lowering the rates of homelessness and to restoring human rights and dignity to homeless people.

After 13 years of Labor Government we are seeing a little bit of action this year. This Government cannot blame the Howard Government; it is the responsibility of the New South Wales Government to make sure people have a home if they choose to have one.

Discussion concluded.

The House adjourned at 7.25 p.m. until Wednesday 12 November 2008 at 10.00 a.m.
