

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Wednesday 28 October 2009

The Speaker (The Hon. George Richard Torbay) took the chair at 10.00 a.m.

The Speaker read the Prayer and acknowledgement of country.

EDUCATION AMENDMENT (SCHOOL ATTENDANCE) BILL 2009

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

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) given.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (CLIMATE CHANGE)

Membership

Motion by Mr John Aquilina agreed to:

That Ms Noreen Hay be appointed to serve on the Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management (Climate Change) in place of Mr David Robert Harris, discharged.

STATE REVENUE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (DEFENCE FORCE CONCESSIONS) BILL 2009

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 21 October 2009.

Mr MIKE BAIRD (Manly) [10.08 a.m.]: I lead for the Opposition on the State Revenue Legislation Amendment (Defence Force Concessions) Bill 2009. The Opposition supports the bill in its broad context. The bill will give men and women serving in the Australian Defence Force access to the same stamp duty and first homeowner concessions as other New South Wales residents when buying their first home. Many defence force personnel have been unable to qualify for stamp duty concessions as the nature of their job may cause them to serve overseas or interstate at short notice and they cannot commit to residing in their property for six months in the first year of purchase as required.

The Opposition is pleased that this inequality is being rectified. However, I will raise a couple of concerns. When this initiative was first announced the Opposition asked the Treasurer some simple questions about how many people were likely to access this concession and the likely impact on the State budget. It was established that no modelling had been done and no-one knew what would happen. The Opposition welcomes this legislation. It is a principled stand and should be implemented to support our defence force personnel. However, the process is an example of the culture of decision-making in this State. That is the crux of the Opposition's concern. The member for Port Stephens will address the impact of stamp duty and its rate of increase relative to property values. I share his concerns about those issues. However, we must examine the fact that the Government made an announcement without doing any basic analysis.

The object of the bill is to amend the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000 to allow a grant, similar to the first home owner grant, to be paid to members of the Australian Defence Force who are first home owners but who do not comply with the residence requirement for the first home owner grant. The new grant will be called the Australian Defence Force Home Buyers Grant. Schedule 1 [3] states that the amount of the grant will be the same value as the first home owner grant and the first home owner boost. Schedule 1 [3] also states that the amendment applies only to permanent members of the Defence Force and not to members of the reserves.

Schedule 2 amends the Duties Act 1997 to provide for a similar concession to the First Home Plus Scheme, which is an exemption from or reduction in duty payable on the purchase of a first home or block of land for a first home for members of the Defence Force. That makes sense.

We must examine the process and how it was announced. The Treasurer referred to this measure during the estimates committee hearings and proudly said that New South Wales was leading the nation with these changes. The Opposition is happy for him to lead the nation with these sorts of changes. Indeed, we would be happy if New South Wales were leading the country with the lowest unemployment rate and the highest growth rate. Sadly, that is not the case. We would also be happy if our businesses had the highest confidence in the country. However, again, not only is that not the case but this State's businesses have the lowest confidence and have had amongst the lowest growth and highest unemployment rates in the past 10 years in this country.

The Government had no idea of the impact of this legislation on the State budget or how many people would access the grant. Questions were asked about the scheme and we were told that no modelling or research had been done. That is an example of how this Government makes decisions. It is a good announcement, but any announcement must be made only after a due diligence process has been pursued. The lack of such processes is the reason this State is in an invidious position with regard to the CBD Metro. This is a very serious issue. Governments cannot announce an initiative simply because it is a good idea. It is a good idea, but such ideas must be subjected to analysis and research about their impact on the budget.

When the Premier announced the CBD Metro he said that the Government and the people involved in it did not know what it would cost. Making announcements without undertaking research and analysis and understanding the full potential impact on the budget is a serious problem. That sort of approach by this Government is the reason this State is in the position it is. That is the golden nugget in understanding this State's plight; it demonstrates how decisions are made in this State. If governments do not do the research and analyses, they go around in circles and plunge the budget deep into the red—that is what we are facing in this State—and there is no credible path back to a healthy balance sheet. That is what this announcement has demonstrated. Notwithstanding the positive side of this measure, the Government had no understanding of its impact on the budget.

The Opposition calls on the Treasurer to include Treasury in every decision to ensure that we know the impact of every initiative on the budget and whether we can afford it. That process should be applied to every decision. While the Treasurer could not answer the question about the cost of this measure, in answer to a question with notice provided after the estimates committee hearing he stated that it is estimated that about 120 defence force personnel are likely to be first home buyers this year. That is based on the assumption that the Defence Force has the same proportion of first home buyers as there is in the New South Wales labour force. That represents between \$2 million and \$3 million, depending on the concessions. Opposition members support this policy, but it would be remiss of us not to make the point that the decision-making culture of the Rees Government must change. It must analyse all initiatives before it makes announcements that it believes will be popular and will work on the evening news. This State deserves much better than that.

As I said, the Opposition acknowledges that this legislation should be implemented. Our defence force personnel deserve this support and they should not be penalised for serving their country. They are dragged away from home and as a result do not qualify for these concessions. Members on this side of the House are pleased that this bill will enable them to get the same level of assistance that other men and women in New South Wales receive when purchasing their first home. I urge the Treasurer to ensure that the necessary analysis is undertaken in respect of all announcements in which he is involved from this day forward and that attention is given not only to leading the nation in measures such as this but also in respect of business confidence, the unemployment rate and economic growth. If he were to pursue those goals, this State would be much better off.

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [10.16 a.m.]: I support the State Revenue Legislation Amendment (Defence Force Concessions) Bill and I will always work to preserve the rights of and the provision of services for defence force personnel. I say that with confidence as a long-time member of the Army Reserve in Newcastle and a proud member of the local sub branch. This legislation seeks to amend the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000 and the Duties Act 1997 relating to first home benefits for defence force personnel. The First Home Owner Grant is provided to applicants purchasing a home that is intended to be occupied as the owner's principal place of residence for at least six months within 12 months of purchase. The requirements apply to the New South Wales Government's \$3,000 new home buyer supplement and to the stamp duty concessions of up to \$17,990.

Permanent defence force personnel must be available for posting or deployment elsewhere in Australia or overseas, often on an unpredictable basis. These deployments are frequently in response to events such as peacekeeping missions and natural disasters and are often in locations at or near war zones. As a result of the unrestricted service requirements imposed on members of the Australian Defence Force, many may be effectively locked out of eligibility for first home benefits if they choose to buy a home while in the service. This legislation will ensure that personnel serving in the permanent Australian Defence Force who are unable to meet the residency test are able to receive financial assistance equivalent to the First Home Owner Grant and State assistance schemes.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [10.19 a.m.]: The State Revenue Legislation Amendment (Defence Force Concession) Bill 2009 will amend the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000 to allow a grant, similar to the first home owner grant, to be paid to members of the Australian Defence Force who are first home buyers but do not comply with the residence requirement for the first home owner grant. It also amends the Duties Act 1997 so that members of the Defence Force do not have to comply with the resident requirement to be eligible for duty concessions under the First Home Plus Scheme. The Office of State Revenue website shows a number of requirements that must be met by applicants for the first-time buyer grant:

- Each applicant must be a natural person and not a company or trust.
- At least one applicant is a permanent resident or Australian citizen.
- Each applicant must be at least 18 years of age.
- All applicants and/or their spouse/de facto have not owned a residential property, jointly, separately or with some other person, in any State or Territory of Australia before 1 July 2000.
- All applicants and/or their spouse/de facto have not owned on or after 1 July 2000 a residential property and occupied that property jointly, separately or with some other person in any State or Territory of Australia for a continuous period of at least six months.
- Each applicant has entered into a contract with the purchase of a home or signed a contract to build the home on or after 1 July 2000. In the case of an owner-builder, laying of the foundations commenced on or after 1 July 2000.
- This is the first time an applicant and/or their spouse/de facto will receive a grant under the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000 in any State or Territory ...
- At least one applicant will occupy the home as their principal place of residence for a continuous period of at least six months, commencing within 12 months of settlement or construction of the home.

Occupancy of a principal place of residence for a continuous period of six months is the nub of this bill. As we all know, occupancy for defence force personnel is transitional. There is no better example of a community in which the Defence Force is well represented than Wagga Wagga, which has three bases, Kapooka, the Royal Australian Air Force [RAAF] and, believe it or not, the Navy. The people of Wagga Wagga are very proud of the contribution made by service men and women to our community, and appreciate the ancillary economic benefit of having defence force bases nearby.

Defence personnel as well as recruits who are undergoing training are stationed at the bases. The local TAFE provides educational services and training backup for defence personnel and that creates employment for local people. Local construction companies also are engaged in providing services to the bases, and that is another example among many others of the flow-on economic benefits to Wagga Wagga produced by proximity. Defence personnel experience some disadvantage as a result of periodic transfers on a rotational basis that is usually every two years. The Wagga Wagga community is very familiar with the effects of rotational transfers. In many ways, defence personnel are disadvantaged purely by the nature of their employment. This bill is intended to address that disadvantage.

As the shadow Minister stated, the Opposition does not oppose the bill, which I suspect will produce dual benefits for defence personnel and the community. Supporting our defence personnel is important to the wider community as much as it is important to the people of Wagga Wagga. I will discuss some equity issues relating to defence personnel who are involved in transitional arrangements, including lost opportunities associated with housing. Currently the Defence Force negotiates contracts to build and lease back properties from investors. An enormous number of properties have been built for the Defence Force and are leased back. There are numerous references to that arrangement on the Defence Force website. Houses are leased back for an agreed period of five years with further options of five-year extensions.

The lease back arrangement has assisted in providing a better standard of housing for defence personnel. The accommodation standard of housing previously provided was questionable if not very poor. Upgrading housing standards was an initiative of the previous Federal Government and was welcomed by investors, the community and defence personnel who really have very limited choice regarding accommodation when they move from town to town. Another aspect of transitional arrangements is that when families move to Wagga Wagga, to Singleton or to any other base, families are quite often disadvantaged through the loss of employment.

Many spouses of defence personnel obtain employment and many are very well qualified. They have had interesting careers and they are achievers, but they have to leave their employment when they are transferred to a new town and that causes severe disadvantage. It is not only difficult to find a job but also difficult for employers who know there is a high probability of spouses of defence personnel remaining in that employment for only two years. Disadvantage associated with transitional living arrangements flows on to families as well as to defence personnel resulting from the recognition by employers that they will lose valued staff members after two years. Before I was elected to Parliament, I was an employer in Wagga Wagga. It was always a great disappointment to me after I had employed a brilliant staff member in whom I had invested a lot of time and money and I prematurely lost that valued employee. That disadvantage also works to the detriment of the families of defence personnel. When I was the President of the Wagga Wagga Chamber of Commerce, I had many discussions with the commandant at Kapooka to try to resolve problems caused by that disadvantage.

In the context of the wider ramifications of this legislation, I point out that when families of defence personnel move, they are disadvantaged in relation to health care. All members know that it is difficult even for permanent local residents to obtain dental and medical appointments and that waiting lists for appointments can be up to three months. Defence personnel have to re-establish relationships with providers of medical services when they move to a new town, and it can be difficult for their families to access treatment as well. However, medical facilities are accessible at emergency departments of local hospitals. As a result of negotiations with the commandant at Kapooka and the local area health service, an after hours medical service in Wagga Wagga has been provided specifically to assist defence personnel and their families. The service has developed and expanded. Last week I attended the annual general meeting of medical practitioners and was told that the service is beneficial, which is what it was designed to be.

While my comments on the bill have focused primarily on discussing the implications of this legislation, I hope that I have also been able to convey for the record my sincere hope that the bill will provide fair treatment for defence personnel. This can occur by improving opportunities for them to purchase their own home and, like the rest of us who are lucky enough to reside permanently in a town of our choosing, invest in bricks and mortar. I also hope that the bill may assist defence personnel and their families to return to Wagga Wagga after service in the Defence Force is completed. Many defence personnel have technical skills that make them suitable for employment at the bases or in industry. They are very highly skilled people, particularly Royal Australian Air Force personnel who are trained in instrumentation and the finer points of engineering. Industries tend to snap them up after they retire from the services.

For the reasons I have stated, I believe that this legislation will bring a number of benefits to the city of Wagga Wagga as well as to defence personnel. Wagga Wagga has always rated in the top 10 in take-up rates for first home owner grants and has been the number one region for uptake in rural areas of New South Wales. Wagga Wagga is Australia's largest inland city with a population growth rate of approximately 1.68 per cent owing to its strong local economy, which is supported by investment, industry and the proximity of Defence Force bases. Recently the Australian Air Force built 100 new defence personnel homes. I envisage a number of flow-on economic benefits for Wagga Wagga. As I stated earlier, I hope my remarks have conveyed to defence personnel and their families how important they are and how highly the Wagga Wagga community and I value the contributions they make. I also hope that the bill will treat them fairly, as they should be treated.

Mr NICK LALICH (Cabramatta) [10.28 a.m.]: I support the State Revenue Legislation Amendment (Defence Force Concessions) Bill 2009. At the outset, I pay my respects to all branches of the Australian Defence Force and to all defence personnel. Australia would be at a great loss if we did not have our armed forces and our Defence Force looking after us. Defence personnel put themselves in harm's way at war zones for our safety; their contribution becomes even more important when we consider the concern of their wives and children who remain at home. Defence personnel not only give their time and effort to the people of Australia, but also sometimes their lives. I pay them sincere tribute for the contribution they make.

This bill will help them in some ways. It includes provisions that will ensure that permanent members of the Australian Defence Force who are unable to meet the residency requirements under the first home owner grant and other State first home buyer assistance schemes are not disadvantaged by their service to Australia. Members of the regular army, permanent navy and permanent air force are subject to an unrestricted service requirement under which they must be free to be posted or deployed across Australia or overseas if necessary. Operational needs and a rotational policy mean that Australian Defence Force personnel will normally be moved to different locations a number of times during their careers. These deployments will often occur at short notice and can involve locations at or near war zones. As a result, Australian Defence Force personnel may be unable to comply with the residency requirement for first home benefits administered by the Office of State Revenue.

The amendments will effectively remove the residence requirement for permanent Australian Defence Force personnel by ensuring that they receive financial assistance equivalent to the first home owner grant and other State first home buyer assistance schemes. The amendments would improve their ability to access the \$7,000 first home owner grant and the stamp duty concession under First Home Plus or First Home Plus One, which is worth up to \$17,990. Applicants may also be eligible for the temporary First Home Owner Boost and the New Home Buyers Supplement. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN (Port Stephens) [10.31 a.m.]: I will make a brief contribution to the State Revenue Legislation Amendment (Defence Force Concessions) Bill 2009. The objects of the bill are to amend the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000 to allow a grant, similar to the first home owner grant, to be paid to members of the Defence Force who are first home owners but do not comply with the residence requirement for the first home owner grant, and to amend the Duties Act 1997 to provide that members of the Defence Force do not have to comply with the residence requirement to be eligible for duty concessions under the First Home Plus scheme. Under the New South Wales first home benefit schemes, first home buyers in New South Wales are able to receive up to \$34,990 in grants and stamp duty concessions, but a key requirement of the first home benefit schemes is that the new home owner must live in the dwelling as their principal place of residence.

Most Australian Defence Force personnel, due to the nature of their employment, are unable to comply with the residence requirement and are unable to benefit from the discretion to fully or partly waive the requirement. Australian Defence Force personnel are required to provide unrestricted service, which means that they must be free to be posted or deployed across Australia and overseas if necessary. Operational requirements and a rotation policy mean that Australian Defence Force personnel are likely to be moved to various localities a number of times, sometimes at short notice and often on an unpredictable basis. Thus Australian Defence Force personnel may be excluded from eligibility for first home benefits.

This bill makes amendments to provide equivalent financial assistance to members of the permanent Australian Defence Force who are unable to meet the residence requirement for the First Home Owner Grant and other first home owner assistance schemes provided by the New South Wales Government. Under the bill, members of the Australian Defence Force who are otherwise eligible for first home assistance will be able to obtain the first home buyer benefits without being disadvantaged by the requirement for unrestricted service with the Australian Defence Force. It is worth noting that these amendments apply to eligible transactions entered into on or after 21 October—last Wednesday—according to the Office of State Revenue website, and that seems to epitomise what New South Wales government agencies think of the legislative process.

However, I am sure that the grant will be gratefully received by many of my constituents, the many Royal Australian Air Force personnel attached to RAAF Base Williamtown. A great percentage of them are posted at Williamtown for varying periods between postings elsewhere, notably Canberra; Tindal, our front-line fighter base just south of Darwin; and overseas in "hot and dusty places"—their words, not mine. Many RAAF personnel who enjoy the Port Stephens lifestyle during their Williamtown postings return to retire in Port Stephens, and many buy their retirement properties while stationed there. This is an unusually generous gesture on the part of the Government. At least, it appears to be a generous gesture. When Labor was first elected, a person buying a median-priced property in Sydney paid \$220,000 for that property and \$6,190 in stamp duty. Fourteen years later, the Sydney median property price is around \$540,000, which is a 145 per cent increase, and the stamp duty payable is \$19,790, which is a 220 per cent increase. It is worth noting also that the building price index—the cost of building a house—has risen 95 per cent in that time.

So while the costs of the materials and labour needed to build a house—the money the "tradies" make, to use a trendy Government term for what we call "subcontractors" or "subbies" in the industry—rise 95 per cent and the house and land package rises 145 per cent, this Government's cut, the stamp duty, rises a massive 220 per cent. Why is it so, I hear you ask? The relatively small rise in building costs is easily explained. The

building industry in New South Wales is a very efficient, competitive and professional industry generally. The occasional shonks appear and disappear and rise again phoenix like from the ashes, leaving trails of destruction for supplier, subbie and client alike. But generally most New South Wales builders are proud of their products and strive to keep clients happy about what, for the majority, is their major financial commitment in life.

The higher rise in property prices is therefore due to increased land prices. The Government seems to enjoy bashing property developers—they are easy targets. But without them where would we be? The one thing I need to build a house—the one thing I cannot do without—is a block of land. Someone has to speculate to produce that block of land. When you combine the convoluted planning process that has developed in New South Wales over the past 14 years with the huge increase in fees and charges levied on developers by this Government to provide infrastructure that, by rights, should be a State government responsibility, you can see why land prices are going through the roof. Every dollar this Government gouges out of developers is paid by the consumer—the first, second or third home buyer.

Ms Sonia Horner: Point of order: I ask that the member for Port Stephens return to the leave of the bill.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! I uphold the point of order. The member for Port Stephens will direct his remarks to the leave of the bill.

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN: I am working through that. The Government announced the Lower Hunter Strategy in 2004. The strategy announced by then super department Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources effectively stopped all rezonings in Port Stephens—it stopped development in Port Stephens. The original Department of Infrastructure, Planning and Natural Resources strategy was not a bad document; it included infrastructure. But the final strategy document was half the size because the Government again ignored its infrastructure obligations.

Ms Sonia Horner: Point of order: The bill is about defence force personnel and the benefits we are giving them through alterations to funding. It is not about stamp duty and other issues per se.

Mr Ray Williams: To the point of order: Much has been said in this debate about the availability of land for defence force personnel. If land is not available for defence force personnel, it will not be available for all sorts of other housing. I think it is relevant to the bill.

Mr Michael Richardson: To the point of order: I have been listening to the member for Port Stephens with considerable interest—indeed, it is more interesting than the contribution of the member for Cabramatta, whose speech was remarkably pedestrian—

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! What is the member's point of order?

Mr Michael Richardson: I am speaking to the point of order. The member for Port Stephens is leading to an important issue relating to his electorate. A large number of service personnel live there—people who would want to buy houses there. I have listened to what the member for Port Stephens has had to say and I think the member for Wallsend is totally premature in interrupting him in the middle of his discourse. I ask you to let him lead us to where he is going.

Ms Sonia Horner: Further to the point of order: The bill is about waiving fees and giving defence force personnel the opportunity to take advantage of benefits unavailable to them because of the nature of their work. It is not about what land is available and those sorts of issues. It is a very specific bill about money for first home buyers that defence force personnel are not eligible for.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! I uphold the point of order. However, I acknowledge some of the issues raised by members who spoke to the point of order. I have already directed the member for Port Stephens to confine his remarks to the leave of the bill. However, he continued to speak outside the leave of the bill. I ask him to specifically address the objects of the bill.

Mr CRAIG BAUMANN: I return to the stamp duty component of the bill. A 220 per cent rise in stamp duty in 14 years is mind blowing. The stamp duty levied on the GST component of a sale is what some would call double taxation, but the biggest slug is the sliding scale for stamp duty. For purchases under \$14,000 the stamp duty percentage is 1.25; it then rises to 1.5 per cent and 1.75 per cent. For the component over

\$80,000 it is 3.5 per cent, and a whopping 4.5 per cent for amounts over \$300,000. On behalf of my military constituents, I welcome the generous offer contained in this bill. On behalf of my electorate, I call on the State Government to get serious about carrying out the core responsibility of providing infrastructure, not the virtual infrastructure that has made this State the butt of jokes by comedians in other States. New South Wales has virtual infrastructure, virtual railway lines to the north-west and the south-west. Why build anything when the Government can announce it every year? This Government needs to provide stamp duty tables. It cannot continue to gouge those who can least afford it to pay for its inefficiencies.

Mr MICHAEL RICHARDSON (Castle Hill) [10.41 a.m.]: The State Revenue Legislation Amendment (Defence Force Concessions) Bill 2009 seeks to amend the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000 to allow a grant to be paid to members of the Defence Force who are first home owners but do not comply with the residence requirement for the first home owner grant, and to amend the Duties Act 1997 so that members of the Defence Force do not have to comply with the residence requirement to be eligible for duty concessions under the First Home Plus Scheme. I note that the amount of money that defence force personnel could stand to benefit from is up to \$29,490, and potentially an additional \$3,000 for new home buyers. So it is a significant amount of money. We are talking about \$32,500 that potentially would be available to defence force personnel if they qualify for these grants.

There is a residency requirement relating to eligibility for these first home benefit schemes. The new homeowner must live in the dwelling as his or her principal place of residence and must take up residence within 12 months of purchasing the property. I have had occasion to write to the authorities on this issue on behalf of constituents when the house has been a complete wreck and the owner has not been able to move in within 12 months. I am glad that in a couple of instances the commissioner has seen sense and looked after my constituents. In this case the issue is about looking after our service men and women, who are important to this country. They are called upon at a moment's notice to go and fight overseas, and the six-month residency requirement is not always possible for them.

The member for Wagga Wagga talked about leaseback properties. I rented a property to defence force housing for about nine years. Often that property was vacant, sometimes for months at a time. It was somebody's home but they were not there and they probably would not have qualified for these grants as a consequence. I am concerned that the Government has not done any modelling on the likely number of applicants or the estimated cost of the program. The member for Manly spoke about this issue at length. It is a matter of concern that the Parliamentary Secretary's agreement in principle speech did not contain an estimate—no estimate has been provided by the Government—as to the likely uptake of the grants or the likely cost to the taxpayers of New South Wales.

I note that there is no precedent for this legislation. The Parliamentary Secretary said that this is a first for an Australian government and that this program has not been initiated by other State governments; nor, apparently, has it been initiated by the Commonwealth Government. I hope that Government members will lobby their colleagues in Canberra to introduce the same sorts of concessions for the first home owners grant as they are applying to stamp duty for defence force personnel. As I said, defence force personnel should not be disadvantaged by joining the armed forces, by fighting for this country and by being sent overseas where, as we have seen tragically on many occasions, they may be injured or killed. It is an appalling travesty that these benefits should be provided to civilians when they are not provided to service men and women.

One issue that concerns me is the way in which these stimulus packages have pushed up the price of properties, which will disadvantage service personnel if they take up the Government's generous offer. Both my children, Andrew and Jane, have bought their first homes this year. One benefited from the grants; the other one did not. Andrew's wife, when she was 15 years old, was made a half owner by her father in a one-bedroom flat in Hurstville. There was still a mortgage on the property when her grandmother died. Effectively, the amount of money that was left to her in the estate was quite small, yet as a consequence of her father's decision about 19 years ago she and Andrew were disqualified from the first home owners grant.

While the Government is making concessions on behalf of service men and women—concessions with which I wholeheartedly agree—there are some anomalies in the current system that have not been examined. Theoretically, on the basis of the situation that faced my son and his wife, there could be a value of just \$2,000 or \$3,000 in a property. Ten children might have shared in their father's largesse at the time, and that \$2,000 or \$3,000 would disqualify them from getting something like \$33,000 in benefits. It was \$37,000 before the first

home owners grant boost was reduced at the beginning of this month. As I said, while there is no question that a combination of lower interest rates and the first home owners grant boost has stimulated the property market, it has almost overstimulated the market. The statistics relating to home purchases show that properties at the lower end of the market, where first home buyers would be expected to purchase properties, have increased in price to a greater extent than properties at the higher end of the market.

A day of reckoning will come, and many young people who may have rushed into buying a home to take advantage of the grants—there was certainly a feeding frenzy when my daughter, Jane, was looking for a property—will end up having paid too much. Interest rates will go up and suddenly they will find they cannot meet the interest repayments and will end up in a mortgagee in possession situation. That is totally undesirable. I hope that that does not happen, and I hope that defence force personnel are not caught in the same trap. The first home owner's concession is designed to stimulate the market, but if it ends up overstimulating the market then it is not desirable.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [10.49 a.m.]: I note that the objects of the State Revenue Legislation Amendment (Defence Force Concessions) Bill 2009 are to amend the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000 to allow a grant, similar to the first home owner grant, to be paid to members of the Defence Force who are first home owners but do not comply with the residence requirement for the first home owner grant, and to amend the Duties Act 1997 so that members of the Defence Force do not have to comply with the residence requirement to be eligible for duty concessions under the First Home Plus Scheme. This is an important measure and I indicate support for the men and women of the Australian Defence Force, who put their lives on the line for the wellbeing of their fellow Australians.

I will provide some background to the bill. The Treasurer, the Hon. Eric Roozendaal, announced these concessions for Australian Defence Force personnel during Treasury estimates hearings on 15 September 2009. However, the Chief Commissioner of State Revenue, Mr Newbury, admitted that no research had been done on the number of personnel likely to take up the concessions. He could not provide an estimate and did not know how many funds would be required. I support the bill but echo the comments of the shadow Treasurer, who highlighted the fact that there has been no model for such a proposal, even though it has merit. It is prudent that the effects and costs of any decision made in this place be analysed if they are to have any credibility with the people of New South Wales.

If we include the cost of the first home owners grant of \$7,000 and a maximum stamp duty concession of \$18,000 under the First Home Plus Scheme, it is feasible that the impact of this bill on the State budget could be around \$25,000 per applicant. If one assumes that one-third of Australian Defence Force personnel come from New South Wales, then in the unlikely scenario that every one of them qualifies the maximum cost could be around \$25 million. I therefore ask the Parliamentary Secretary to provide updated figures when she replies to the debate. It is the Opposition's view that the measure is likely to cost the State in the vicinity of \$2 million to \$3 million.

I note that the Office of State Revenue will conduct checks to ensure that applicants comply with the residency requirement. Those who do not comply will be required to repay the grant and duty, and in some cases may be subject to penalties. I seek also more details on the inspection process because I am concerned, in particular, about the cost of those inspections. However, I am pleased that stamp duty savings for first home buyers, particularly in the Tweed electorate, have produced significant and pleasing results. At the end of last year I asked a question on notice of the Minister for Finance with respect to first home buyer grants in the Tweed electorate.

The Minister informed me that in 2006-07, 462 first home buyers purchased houses valued at under \$500,000, and 14 people purchased houses valued at between \$500,000 and \$750,000. In 2007-08, 395 first home buyers purchased houses valued at under \$500,000, and 27 bought houses valued at between \$500,000 and \$750,000. Last year there were 81 first home buyers for houses valued at under \$500,000, and six for houses valued at between \$500,000 and \$750,000. Those are significant figures. In 2006-07 first home buyers in the Tweed electorate saved \$4.7 million in stamp duty, in 2007-08 they saved \$4.6 million, and as at the end of last year they were on track to save more than \$900,000.

I know a number of members of the Australian Defence Force. One young lass, Captain Bree Hammond, is currently serving in Afghanistan and doing a wonderful job. She is looking at purchasing a house

in the Tweed electorate. All members understand the importance of creating affordable housing so that first home buyers can enter the housing market. However, cross-border issues remain a problem. If one were to build \$300,000 kit homes on identical blocks of land on either side of the border, it would cost \$30,000 less to build in Queensland because of stamp duty and other charges imposed by the New South Wales Government. Those taxes have forced people, including first home buyers in my electorate, to move elsewhere. However, with the recent changes, more people are buying houses. I do not oppose the bill because any measures that assist Australian Defence Force personnel are to be applauded.

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [10.55 a.m.]: I make a short contribution to the State Revenue Legislation Amendment (Defence Force Concessions) Bill 2009. I note that the objects of the bill are to amend the First Home Owner Grant Act 2000 to allow a grant, similar to the first home owner grant, to be paid to members of the Defence Force who are first home owners but do not comply with the residence requirement for the first home owner grant, and to amend the Duties Act 1997 to provide that members of the Defence Force do not have to comply with the residence requirement to be eligible for duty concessions under the First Home Plus Scheme.

As we all know, government administers a number of State and Commonwealth first home benefits schemes through the Office of State Revenue. One of the key requirements to benefit from the scheme is that new home owners must live in the dwelling as their principal place of residence. That means, of course, that one of the applicants must occupy the home as their principal place of residence for at least six months, commencing within 12 months of purchase. The Chief Commissioner of State Revenue has the discretion to reduce the period of occupation, extend the period when occupation commences, or indeed exempt an applicant from residence requirements.

Many Australian Defence Force personnel, due to the nature of their employment, are unable to comply with the residence requirement, and therefore are unable to benefit from the discretion to fully or partly waive the requirement. We all understand, too, that Australian Defence Force personnel are required to provide unrestricted service, meaning that they must be free to be posted or deployed across Australia or overseas when necessary. We have general knowledge of the nature of the work undertaken by our Defence Force, but I can speak also from personal experience. Over the past few years my son has served in many theatres while on deployment not only within this country but also overseas in areas of conflict and on peacekeeping duties.

Broadly speaking, the range of duties undertaken by defence force personnel makes it impossible for them to settle in one particular location certain in the knowledge that they can fulfil the residence requirements of the previous legislation. I support this bill because a number of Australian Defence Force personnel serve in the Albury-Wodonga area, which is home to the Army Logistics Training Centre. The centre employs an enormous number of people, who are posted there on a short-term basis for both training and trainee purposes. It is the same at Kapooka in the electorate of the member for Wagga Wagga, where so many trainees and trainers are present for relatively short periods. Indeed, my son served at Kapooka for a year in a training capacity and resided in the city but of course would have been unable to purchase a home under the scheme had he so desired. The same situation affects all our Australian Defence Force personnel.

This bill establishes some form of equity in that, rather than being excluded, personnel will now be eligible to obtain the first home owner benefits without being disadvantaged by the requirement regarding unrestricted service with the Australian Defence Force. This necessary bill takes account of the great work undertaken by defence force personnel who are constantly being moved, posted or deployed. This bill takes up the areas of concern that have been expressed and allows personnel to participate fully in the available first home owner grants.

Ms LYLEA McMAHON (Shellharbour—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.00 a.m.], in reply: I thank all members who have participated in this debate. This is an important piece of legislation that will ensure defence personnel are able to enjoy the same first home owner benefits as other Australians. It is also an Australian first, with New South Wales leading the way in legislating for these changes, and making it easier for those in our army, navy and air force to realise the great Australian dream of home ownership. The member for Manly claimed that this decision was not based on modelling. I advise that the Office of Financial Management in Treasury did modelling, although questions from the Opposition at estimates were directed to the Office of State Revenue, which will administer the program. I am happy to assist the Opposition to overcome its confusion.

In relation to the other claims of the member for Manly, the Treasurer has constantly spoken about the green shoots of recovery in the New South Wales economy. It is an absolute shame that the Opposition continues to talk down the State's economy even when there is such good news. For the benefit of the member

for Port Stephens, we have some of the most generous benefits for first home buyers in Australia and this is about extending those benefits to defence personnel. The member for Port Stephens simply missed the point. The Australian Defence Force currently has approximately 3,000 members deployed overseas to places such as Afghanistan, Iraq and East Timor. They are often called away at short notice, which in turn makes it difficult for many defence personnel to meet the residency requirement when purchasing their first home. These reforms ensure that they do not unfairly miss out on the New South Wales and Federal Government generous first home owner programs.

This includes: a \$7,000 grant to all first home buyers, and an exemption on stamp duty for all homes worth up to \$500,000, with a concessional rate of stamp duty payable on homes valued between \$500,000 and \$600,000. This is worth up to \$17,990 per home and it was a New South Wales initiative. A further \$3,000 grant is available to first home buyers purchasing a newly constructed home, which will give an extra incentive for first home buyers to stimulate the housing construction sector. The Federal Government's boost payments of \$14,000 from October last year ended in September this year, and the payment of up to \$7,000 will be available until the end of 2009. These payments have been an important part of the Rudd Government's economic stimulus plan, with the higher payments targeted to buyers of newly constructed homes. This legislation means that the men and women risking their lives serving Australia have one less thing to worry about whilst on deployment. It ensures that they do not miss out on our generous assistance programs for first home buyers. I commend the bill to the House.

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

Motion agreed to.

Bill agreed to in principle.

Passing of the Bill

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

BUDGET ESTIMATES AND RELATED PAPERS

Financial Year 2009-2010

Debate resumed from 27 October 2009.

Mr PAUL GIBSON (Blacktown) [11.07 a.m.]: It is a pleasure to speak on the budget that was brought down some months ago. Following the delivery of the budget the *Daily Telegraph* reported on its contents. Under the subheading "Economy" the article stated that unemployment was tipped to hit 8.5 per cent within 18 months. Even with the downturn in the world economy unemployment in this State reached only 6.1 per cent. So this Government has done very well and the forecast of 8.5 per cent within 18 months is way off the mark. The article continued:

... NSW is expected to be in the red until 2012. Government debt is expected to rise to \$50 billion by 2012, with the Government promising to rein in spending growth. The good news is there are no new taxes.

That was very good news at the time, particularly considering what happened after the budget came down and the downturn in the world economy. Decisions made by this Government in that budget proved to be very beneficial to the people of New South Wales. Under the subheading "Jobs" the *Daily Telegraph* also stated:

Unemployment to rise to 8.5 per cent by 2010/11 while public sector wages to be capped at 2.5 per cent, unless offset by employee productivity. Workers in Sydney's west to benefit from a \$4.4 million Western Sydney Employment Fund to boost business and expansion.

That is exactly what happened. We must remember that more people live in western Sydney than in Western Australia, South Australia or Tasmania. New South Wales is the powerhouse of the Australian economy based on business, 98 per cent of which is small business. Where is most of that small business located? In western Sydney. Under "Families" the newspaper stated:

The beleaguered Department of Community Services will get an extra \$1.6 billion

That was a blessing. In the seven years when the Coalition was in government we saw a decrease in the amount of money to that department and in the number of workers in the department. That extra \$1.6 billion is money well spent.

Mr Geoff Provest: Did you get any for radiation treatment?

Mr PAUL GIBSON: I will come to that. The article continues:

Almost 8000 children to be enrolled in a Brighter Future program while public housing will be boosted by 13,000 homes to 30,000 by 2012.

I have spoken many times in this Chamber about people looking for homes. Not one day goes by without somebody coming into my office at Blacktown saying that they are homeless and desperate and asking what I can do for them. The stark truth is that the Department of Housing waiting list in Blacktown alone has 1,800 names. I feel weak when I say to somebody that I will do all I can to help them but there are already 1,800 people on the list who have been waiting for three to seven years. That paints a fairly bleak future for them. All the money and extra homes that can be built for people are a godsend. Earlier this year I asked that the Federal and State governments look at turning unused army camps or refugee camps into public housing, even as a short-term measure. At least it would help to retain the self-respect of people and provide a place for them to live to raise their children until they are given a more permanent home. Under "Health" the article stated:

The health system will benefit from a \$15.1 billion spending spree including 106 new hospital beds and the expansion of Nepean Hospital to include six new operating theatres, and ...

Many other hospitals will benefit. I recently spoke to someone from overseas who said his wife took ill while he was in Australia and that the care she received in the public hospital system was beyond belief. We all hear bad stories when something goes wrong but we do not often hear the thousands of good stories that happen every week. Our public health system is as good as can be found anywhere in the world today. I am the first to admit that the only thing it lacks is money.

Today more than a third of the State's budget is allocated to health. Of course, the only way to overcome that is for the Federal Government to put more money into healthcare in New South Wales and also to acknowledge that a large proportion of the GST paid by New South Wales is not returned in services. New South Wales subsidises Queensland and some other States. That is why the Queensland Government can subsidise the purchase price of petrol—but it is the people of New South Wales who are subsidising the petrol levies in Queensland.

Mr Michael Richardson: They are gone.

Mr PAUL GIBSON: Yes, but we did it for a long time. New South Wales should get its due return of the GST. More than one-third of Australia's population lives in New South Wales, but we are not getting our fair share of the GST return. I thought that the Rudd Government would have been the first Government to revise that, that it would be fair and would do what it said prior to the election and give New South Wales its fair share of the GST return. I hope that that will happen.

The New South Wales Government investment in services and infrastructure includes a record \$15.1 billion in the Health budget; a record \$14.7 billion in the Education budget; a record \$7.1 billion in the Transport budget; and a record \$4.4 billion in the Roads budget. Recently I drove along the Pacific Highway to Bulahdelah. That new stretch of highway is an absolute pleasure to drive along. Of course, the bulk of the money for that upgrade did not come from the Federal Government; it came from the State Government, State ratepayers. The budget has allocated a record \$2.62 billion to Police, a record \$1.6 billion to Community Services, and a record \$903 million to Emergency Services. The revised forecast of the deficit for 2008-2009 is \$1.337 billion. Compare Labor's record as fiscal managers over the 12 years we have been in government with the record for the Coalition's seven years in power. The Coalition absolutely failed: it did not get one budget in surplus. All seven of its budgets were in deficit. And they talk about fiscal managers! After Labor was elected to government—

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarritty): Order! There is too much interjection.

Mr PAUL GIBSON: Yes, there is, but it is helping me pan this out a bit. When elected, we had to pay off a massive debt. We did that quite easily.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! The member for Blacktown will direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr PAUL GIBSON: New South Wales also ran the greatest Olympic Games that the world has ever seen, and the first to make a profit. Not only that, we paid for the Games as we went along. We did not do what previous governments had done with things such as the building of the Sydney Harbour Bridge and so on: leave a debt for the next generation, and the generation after that. We have done fairly well as fiscal managers. Today more than 300,000 people reside in Blacktown, one of the great areas of the State. I recently pointed out that one in every 73 people in Australia today lives in Blacktown. We are a major city of this nation.

A recent announcement affecting Blacktown was the provision of the commuter car park. Blacktown is the busiest morning station in the rail network, and it has needed a car park for a long time. Many years ago the powers that be decided not to install a car park at Blacktown because that station was so busy. It was decided to offset the crowds at Blacktown by installing a commuter car park at Seven Hills. There was a bit of logic in that idea at the time, but today Seven Hills is absolutely full, and so is Blacktown. The people of Blacktown welcomed the announcement of the building of a 500-car commuter car park at Blacktown. It will be finished prior to the 2011 election, which we promised it would be.

Another good provision in the budget was Nurragingy Reserve at Blacktown, which is probably the best-kept secret in Australia. If one wants to host a wedding, or go for a picnic or a day out, or if one wants to look at Australia in its natural state, one should go to Nurragingy Reserve. It is delightful and it has been given to the council for a 60-year lease with a 25-year option; that is, it has been given back to the people of Blacktown for the next 85 years. The ratepayers of Blacktown have put many millions of dollars into improving that area, and that money has been well spent. The allocation for the commuter car park was \$170.6 million. The excellent police at Blacktown received extra officers and extra funding in the budget. Today there are approximately 170 police officers there, and they do a wonderful job, from the superintendent down.

Mr Michael Richardson: Name them.

Mr PAUL GIBSON: If I had a list I would name them. I often say at a public address or a business function that we have a good story to tell in New South Wales, and it is a good story. The last budget helped make that story even better. Two weeks ago I spoke to a well-known commentator. I said to him, "We have a good story to tell." He said, "Well, you convince me that you have a good story", to which I replied, "I will do my best". I spoke to him for a while, but I do not know whether I convinced him. I said that the media love talking about this State as a basket case with the worst Government that this nation has ever seen. This is the first time the budget has been in deficit in 13 years. So we are not doing too badly. Not only that, we have retained our triple-A credit rating.

Mr Nick Lalich: Hear! Hear!

Mr PAUL GIBSON: Government members are well versed on this. We have retained our triple-A credit rating during very hard economic times, and it was not easy to do. I often hear members of the Opposition say that Queensland is the place to go and that Queensland is leading the way. However, Queensland has just lost its triple-A credit rating, so it is not doing too well. Western Australia, the nation's mining leader, is in all sorts of bother at the moment. Today it is not easy to retain a triple-A credit rating, but New South Wales has done that.

Previously I mentioned unemployment. The New South Wales unemployment rate is 6.1 per cent. The commentator I referred to told me that the figure for the rest of the country is 5.8 per cent. So our level is 0.3 per cent higher. However, not factored into that percentage is that a third of Australia's population lives in New South Wales. Therefore, that unemployment rate is an excellent outcome. I would like to see unemployment at zero, but it will never be zero. Regarding on-time running of trains, a new timetable was introduced two weeks ago. Since then there has been 99 per cent on-time running. Over the past 14 months on-time running was 96 per cent, and that was better than for the Tube in London. However, the Opposition no longer talks about on-time running; it has changed its tack and talks about overcrowding on trains.

More people are using the trains today than ever before because they know they run on time, they know we are trying to keep them as clean as we possibly can, and they know there is new stock coming on line all the time. We are a car-orientated society and we have to do those sorts of things in order to get people back onto the trains. Granted, the higher fuel costs have also meant that more people are using public transport than ever before.

Everything is not gloomy in this State. Big and small businesses will tell you that New South Wales is the place to do business. Let us look at crime. We see sensational stories in the papers all the time, but in 16 categories of crime the rates have either remained the same or there has been a reduction. That in itself is another pat on the back for this Government. There is a good story to tell and we should all be very proud of that story. When the next election rolls around in about 16 months time the people of New South Wales—

Mr John Williams: You might be Premier.

Mr PAUL GIBSON: Stranger things have happened. When the election comes around the people will have a look at how they are going in their skyrocket. They will see how secure their jobs are and they will look to see whether the Opposition has any policies. Of course, they will look in the Opposition's policy cupboard and the cupboard will be bare because the Opposition's policies at the moment could be written on the back of a piece of confetti. We have not seen any policies. You cannot fool the people of New South Wales. I was going to say something about a canary but I thought I had better not.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr PAUL GIBSON: The people will judge us on our record but they will also judge the Opposition on its record.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! The member for Blacktown has the call.

Mr PAUL GIBSON: Fiscally, 12 out of our 13 budgets have been in surplus. The Opposition's record was seven out of seven in deficit, so I would not be talking about fiscal matters and budgets this Government has brought forward if I were an Opposition member. I have just received an announcement.

Mr Daryl Maguire: Gibbo, it says, "Wind it up."

Mr PAUL GIBSON: I will tell you what it says: "Erskine Park link road. \$80 million State funds. Another 16,500 jobs in western Sydney. Release of 800 hectares of land." As I said, we have a good story to tell and we will be telling that story over and over between now and the next election. The next election will not be the easy run that the Opposition thinks it will be. It is very hard to change 15 or 16 seats in any election. A lot of members who hold their electorates by less than 10 per cent—the good members who work hard—will hang on in tough times. That is not factored in when we read poll results. The next election is far from over. The Labor Party is still alive and kicking and we are not the basket case that the Opposition keep telling themselves we are.

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

CRIMINAL PROCEDURE AMENDMENT (CASE MANAGEMENT) BILL 2009

Bill introduced on motion by Mr Barry Collier, on behalf of Ms Carmel Tebbutt.

Agreement in Principle

Mr BARRY COLLIER (Miranda—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.24 a.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The Government is pleased to introduce the Criminal Procedure Amendment (Case Management) Bill 2009, which will make significant changes to the way criminal trials are run in the higher courts of New South Wales. Recent figures from the Productivity Commission indicate that New South Wales criminal courts lead the nation in the timely completion of criminal matters. However, there are indications that criminal trial durations in the State have been trending upwards in the last 10 years. This general upward trend in New South Wales is not of itself a cause for concern. The duration of criminal trials has increased drastically in all Australian jurisdictions in recent decades. Gone are the days when a murder trial could be conducted in under a week. For the most part, there are good reasons for this. Advances in technology have resulted in forensic evidence that is greater in both volume and complexity than in years gone by, and the rapid adoption of electronic communication in the last 20 years has resulted in an exponential increase in the amount of electronic evidence that is adduced in criminal trials.

However, not all causes of increased trial durations can be said merely to reflect scientific progress, and steps should be taken to provide mechanisms to minimise unnecessary delays in trials, whatever their cause. Further, steps should be taken to manage the impact of the volume of technical evidence on the duration of criminal trials, as this volume is only likely to increase with further advances in technology. With these issues in mind, the Government formed the Trial Efficiency Working Group, made up of members of the judiciary and senior representatives of the legal profession from both sides of criminal practice, and government and non-government bodies, to consider the causes of delay in criminal trials and to propose possible solutions. This bill seeks to implement those recommendations of the working group that require legislative change, and is the result of discussion and agreement between the Chief Judge at Common Law of the Supreme Court of New South Wales, the Chief Judge of the District Court, the Director of Public Prosecutions, and the Senior Public Defender on the best way to give effect to those recommendations.

The bill replaces part 3, division 3 of the Criminal Procedure Act 1986, which contains provisions relating to pre-trial disclosure in complex trials, with new provisions that provide for multiple tiers of case management. The first level is the mandatory exchange of notices between the prosecution and defence prior to the commencement of the trial. These notices will comprise non-sensitive information about each party's case, and in most matters no further case management will be required beyond the exchange of notices. The amendments recognise that the majority of criminal trials do not require substantial case management. Most trials are straightforward affairs and it is not the intention of the Government to impose unnecessary red tape on comparatively simple cases. Rather, the focus is on those criminal trials that would benefit from pre-trial case management, due to the complexity of the relevant issues, the volume of evidence involved, or for other reasons that are apparent to the courts.

In less straightforward matters the court will be able to order intermediate levels of case management, in the form of pre-trial hearings and pre-trial conferences. The purpose of the hearings and conferences will be to determine issues such as the admissibility of evidence prior to the empanelment of the jury. At the highest level of case management courts will be able to order pre-trial disclosure, requiring the defence to give a more detailed response to the initial prosecution notice. This response will not require the defence to disclose its case, although the defence will be required to identify those parts of the prosecution case as outlined in the initial prosecution notice that are in dispute, and the prosecution evidence that will be the subject of an objection, among other things.

Courts may refuse to admit evidence where it was not disclosed to the other party in accordance with the requirements for pre-trial disclosure. Similarly, courts may refuse to admit evidence from an expert witness where a copy of a report by the expert witness was not provided to the other party in accordance with the pre-trial disclosure requirements. Where a court allows the admission of such evidence, and doing so would prejudice the case of the other party, the court may grant an adjournment to the affected party. A court is currently able to order a similar form of pre-trial disclosure under section 136 of the Criminal Procedure Act where, having regard to the likely length of the trial, the nature of the evidence to be adduced at the trial, or the legal issues likely to arise at the trial, the court is satisfied that the trial will be complex.

In practice, however, the provisions were very rarely invoked, particularly in the District Court, and the working group formed the view that the test for identifying complex criminal trials was unnecessarily restricting the application of section 136. A key distinction of the new pre-trial disclosure provisions will be that a court will be able to order them in any case where it would be in the interests of the administration of justice to do so, rather than applying the existing complex criminal trial test. The higher tiers of case management do not merely represent escalating responses to failures by one or both of the parties to comply with the lower tiers, although it is open to the courts to utilise them in this fashion. Where it becomes immediately apparent to the court that a case would benefit from pre-trial disclosure, it will be able to make relevant orders without first needing to conduct pre-trial hearings or conferences.

In addition to these pre-trial measures, courts will be given a general power to manage the trial on or after its commencement. The power will allow the court to make such orders, determinations and findings, or give directions or rulings, as it thinks appropriate for the efficient management and conduct of the trial. This will include making orders for disclosure that were made or could have been made prior to the commencement of the trial under the proposed amendments. Unexpected and unnecessary delays can arise during the course of a trial, whether due to the nature of the evidence involved, the conduct of the parties, or other factors. This power will allow a judge to deal with these situations regardless of whether pre-trial case management was ordered in that case.

The aim of the bill is to increase the efficiency of the trial process and it does so by introducing a number of mechanisms that will give those involved the means to identify and resolve issues at the beginning of a matter rather than during the trial itself. This will also assist members of the judiciary in undertaking their role in the trial by allowing them to be informed early in the trial process of the relevant issues. For these efficiencies to be achieved it will need the profession to embrace the changes and fully utilise the procedures that have been made available. In this regard, the Attorney General has been greatly assisted by the Trial Efficiency Working Group, which has assisted in identifying what can usefully be introduced and used by the profession and the judiciary.

I will now briefly outline the more significant provisions of the bill. Schedule 1 [4] substitutes division 3 of part 3 of chapter 3 of the principal Act to set out a new scheme for the management of proceedings on indictment. Clauses 137 and 138 require the prosecutor, at a time to be specified by the judge at the first mention of the matter, to give the accused person notice of the prosecution case, and for the accused person to give a response to the prosecutor's notice. The court has been given the discretion to determine the time frames within which these notices must be given in order to provide them the flexibility to respond to the level of complexity of each matter. While the bill could have imposed specific time frames for compliance, this approach will allow judges the ability to impose a time frame, which accommodates the listing of a matter, thereby avoiding unnecessary delays.

The clauses also set out the matters that are to be included in the respective notices. Among other things, the prosecution notice will include a statement of facts, and copies of any documents and reports the prosecution proposes to adduce at trial. The defence response will include notice of any consents to be given under section 190 of the Evidence Act, and statements as to whether the accused intends to give a notice of alibi or a notice of intention to adduce evidence of substantial mental impairment. Clause 139 enables the court to order the prosecutor and the accused person to attend one or more pre-trial hearings. The court may make various orders and rulings during those hearings—for example, as to the admissibility of evidence or on questions of law that might arise at the trial—that will be binding on the trial judge unless, in the opinion of the trial judge, it would not be in the interests of justice for them to be binding. If a pre-trial hearing was held and certain matters were not raised at the hearing, the leave of the court will be required before those matters can be raised at the trial.

Clause 140 enables the court to order that the prosecutor and the accused person's legal representative attend a pre-trial conference for the purpose of reaching agreement regarding the evidence to be admitted at trial. This conference can be requested by the parties or be ordered on the court's own motion. After such a conference, the prosecutor and the accused person's legal representative will file a pre-trial conference form indicating the areas of agreement and disagreement, and departure from the agreements indicated in the form will not be permitted without the leave of the court, based on an interests of justice test. Clause 141 enables the court to order pre-trial disclosure on application of a party to the proceedings or on the court's own initiative if it is in the interests of the administration of justice to do so. Under clause 142 the pre-trial disclosure requirements for the prosecutor include the requirements imposed under clause 137, although the notice required under that section will need to be updated with any new material that has come to light since it was first provided.

In addition, the prosecution must provide the defence with any material in the prosecutor's possession that would be regarded as adverse to the credit or credibility of the accused person, and a list identifying the statements of those witnesses who are proposed to be called at the trial by the prosecution. The pre-trial disclosure requirements for the accused person are to provide a defence response in accordance with clause 143, including statements as to the facts alleged by the prosecution that the defence intends to dispute, and notice of certain matters that the defence intends to raise in relation to the evidence proposed to be adduced by the prosecution. This includes a broad requirement to give notice as to whether the admissibility of any proposed evidence disclosed by the prosecution will be disputed, and the basis for that objection.

Other requirements under clause 143 require the defence to give notice of more specific issues taken with material disclosed by the prosecution. In some circumstances there will be some overlap between the broad requirement to give notice regarding the disputed admissibility of prosecution evidence and the more specific requirements in clause 143. This is intentional. We have taken particular note of the issues that cause delays in criminal trials and we have taken steps to ensure that the parties in criminal proceedings will have to cast their minds to each of these issues. The contents of the defence response may necessitate a further response by the prosecution, including whether the prosecution intends to dispute the admissibility of evidence the defence proposes to adduce.

Clause 145 enables the court to dispense with formal proof of certain matters in proceedings where the matters were not disputed in the course of pre-trial disclosure. Clause 145 (1) is of relevance to facts. The proposed section also enables the court to allow evidence of two or more witnesses to be adduced in the form of a summary in certain circumstances. Clause 146 enables the court to refuse to admit evidence that was not disclosed in accordance with the pre-trial disclosure requirements of the proposed division and to exclude expert evidence where a copy of the report of the evidence was not provided to the other party in accordance with those requirements. The court may also grant an adjournment if a party to proceedings seeks to adduce evidence not previously disclosed that would prejudice the case of the other party to the proceedings. The court cannot use its powers under the proposed section to prevent the accused person adducing evidence unless the prosecutor has complied with the pre-trial disclosure requirements.

Clause 149D provides that, with specified exceptions, the prosecutor is not required to disclose anything in a notice under the proposed division if it has already been included in the brief of evidence or otherwise provided or disclosed to the accused person. Similarly, the accused person is not required to include in a notice anything that has already been provided to the prosecutor. Clause 149E makes it clear that, on or after the commencement of the trial proceedings, the court may make orders, determinations or findings, or give directions or rulings for the efficient management and conduct of the trial, including ordering any of the parties to the proceedings to make disclosures that would have been required under the proposed division before the commencement of the trial.

Clause 149F creates a number of miscellaneous provisions, including clarification that the Act is not intended to limit any disclosure requirements currently imposed on the parties in a criminal trial by sources such as the common law, other legislation and rules of court, and the prosecution guidelines of the Office of the Director of Public Prosecutions. Even where the court orders disclosure under clause 141, the common law or other sources may require a higher level of disclosure than that prescribed in this legislation. It is not the intention of the Act to limit the operation of such requirements. The Act will only prevail over such requirements where it is impossible, or impracticable, to comply with both.

Schedule 1 [3] substitutes section 130A of the principal Act to extend its application to all proceedings on indictment, not just sex offences. Further, all orders made during the course of a trial, not just pre-trial orders, will be binding on a subsequent trial judge. Currently section 130A of the principal Act provides that a pre-trial order made by a judge in certain sexual offence proceedings is generally binding on the trial judge in the proceedings unless it would not be in the interests of justice for the order to be binding. The impact of inefficient trials reaches beyond mere financial considerations. Unnecessary delays in criminal trials bring the jury trial system into disrepute, while placing intolerable burdens on juries, victims of crime, accused persons and witnesses. This bill represents the Government's commitment to minimise such delays. I have pleasure in commending the bill to the House.

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

HEALTH PRACTITIONER REGULATION BILL 2009

Bill introduced on motion by Ms Carmel Tebbutt.

Agreement in Principle

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT (Marrickville—Deputy Premier, and Minister for Health) [11.42 a.m.]:
I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

I am pleased to introduce the Health Practitioner Regulation Bill 2009. The bill provides for the implementation in New South Wales of the Health Practitioner Regulation National Law. The national law sets out the regulatory framework for the new National Registration and Accreditation Scheme for Health Professionals. It implements the agreement signed in 2008 by the Council of Australian Governments to establish the National Registration Scheme by 1 July 2010. As such the national law represents a significant development in the Australian healthcare system and the regulatory framework that has contributed to the very high standard of health professional education and professionalism enjoyed in Australia.

The national law provides for the registration at a national level of 10 health professions: chiropractic, dentistry—including dental hygienists, dental therapists and dental prosthetists—medicine, nursing and

midwifery, optometry, osteopathy, pharmacy, physiotherapy, podiatry and psychology. Four further professions will be added to the national scheme in July 2012: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health practice, Chinese medicine, medical radiation practice and occupational therapy. The national law has been developed by a team of officials over the past 18 months. During the development of the legislation there has been an extensive consultation process involving a series of national and State forums that provided for engagement with health professionals, professional associations, regulatory bodies and the public.

Over the course of the consultation process over 550 formal submissions were received with the ideas raised in those submissions providing a number of valuable and practical improvements to the legislation and the scheme as a whole. Under the national law registered health practitioners will pay a single registration fee that will entitle them to work across the entire country without being required to meet additional criteria or pay additional fees. The national law will ensure that nationally uniform processes and criteria exist for registering practitioners and accrediting educational programs. The establishment of these uniform processes and standards will mean that uniformly high standards will be applied nationwide and that the public can have increased confidence that all registered health practitioners meet appropriately high standards.

The national law provides also for the mandatory reporting of practitioners who are placing the public at risk of harm due to the manner in which they practise their profession, including practising while intoxicated or affected by drugs; practising in a manner that represents a substantial departure from accepted professional practice; or engaging in sexual misconduct in the course of practice. Many of the essential public protection features of the national law already exist in New South Wales law in substantially the same fashion as they appear in the national law. These features include mandatory reporting, which applies to medical practitioners in New South Wales; mandatory professional indemnity insurance, which applies to all professions in New South Wales other than nursing and midwifery; and the requirement for all registrants to lodge an annual return that provides information relevant to ongoing registration to the registration authorities.

Members will be aware that all national systems are, necessarily, the result of negotiation and compromise to reach outcomes acceptable to all jurisdictions. The national law to be adopted by this bill is no different, and practitioners and regulators in New South Wales will find some differences in how registration, accreditation and other processes will be managed under the national scheme. The processes for approving standards for the accreditation of education courses have been contentious. During the consultation process on the national law professional groups identified concerns that the original Council of Australian Government's agreement gave the ministerial council final power of approval over the standards that will be used to accredit courses. Under clause 11 (4) of the national law the council now will have power to intervene only where there is a concern that the standards will have a substantive and negative impact on the recruitment or supply of health practitioners.

The council will be required also to give consideration to the potential impact of the council's direction on the quality and safety of health care. While I recognise that some professional groups may take the view that there should be even further restrictions on the ministerial council, the Government considers this is a sensible and appropriate solution to ensure a cooperative approach on these issues. As I have indicated already, there are some areas where, through negotiation and discussion, compromises are necessary to reach agreement on a national system. However, equally there are areas where compromise is not possible; where the protection of the public is the paramount consideration. For this reason this Government has argued consistently that there can be no compromise in ensuring the maintenance of a strong, accountable and transparent disciplinary and complaints system in New South Wales.

Members will be aware that the healthcare complaints system in New South Wales is unique in Australia. It divides the complaints and disciplinary roles between the health professional boards and the independent Health Care Complaints Commission. This structure evolved over many years, starting in response to the Chelmsford Hospital scandals in the 1980s through to the establishment of Australia's first fully independent healthcare complaints investigator in 1993. The changes made to the New South Wales system over the last 20 years have focused consistently on enhancing the public accountability of health service providers and improving the capacity of the complaints system to protect the public.

As members may be aware, the national law's complaints model adopts processes similar to those that currently apply in most other States and Territories. It is markedly different from the current New South Wales model as it relies primarily on the health professional boards to undertake disciplinary functions and does not provide for an independent investigator and prosecutor, such as the Health Care Complaints Commission. This Government remains committed to the Health Care Complaints Commission as an integral element in

complaints management in New South Wales. For this reason I am pleased to advise the House that the Government has brokered an agreement with the other States and Territories that will enable New South Wales to maintain its current healthcare complaints system and retain the New South Wales Health Care Complaints Commission.

New South Wales will now participate in national registration as a co-regulatory jurisdiction. As a result, the bill I bring before the House specifically provides that New South Wales will not adopt the national law complaints model, which is set out in divisions 3 to 12 of part 8 of the national law. Under the proposed New South Wales approach the national registration boards will be expressly precluded from dealing with complaints about matters occurring in New South Wales and those matters must be referred to the New South Wales authorities, including the Health Care Complaints Commission, to be managed.

As New South Wales is not adopting the National Complaints Model, further legislation will be required at a State level to re-establish and consolidate the New South Wales professional regulation system. This legislation, which the Government will introduce before the end of the current session, is being developed in consultation with key New South Wales stakeholders and the regulators, including the Health Care Complaints Commission. The legislation will reflect the Government's commitment to retain the commission as a separate entity and also will extend many recent reforms to the Medical Practice Act to other professional groups.

Stakeholders in New South Wales have uniformly welcomed the commitment of the Government to retain the existing complaints system and recognise the benefits that a robust, independent and transparent system delivers to the public, health practitioners and the health system as a whole. Health Ministers have agreed that the practitioners of other jurisdictions will not be called on to fund the complaints system in New South Wales and that practitioners in New South Wales equally will not be called on to fund the complaints system established under the national law.

The New South Wales Government also is committed to maintaining the substantial New South Wales subsidy to the healthcare complaints system through Government funding of the Health Care Complaints Commission. It is therefore anticipated that in most, if not all, cases registration fees payable for practitioners based in New South Wales will continue to be lower than those of the rest of the nation. As I have indicated already, the Government proposes to bring a separate bill before the Parliament later in this session to implement the New South Wales complaints system and to make any other legislative changes that are required as a consequence of the national system.

I extend the Government's thanks to all of the health practitioners, both in New South Wales and other jurisdictions, who have freely given of their time and expertise to help develop the national registration and accreditation system. I congratulate those who have been appointed to the various national boards. The implementation of the national registration and accreditation scheme represents an exciting development in professional regulation in Australia. I commend the bill to the House.

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

BUDGET ESTIMATES AND RELATED PAPERS

Financial Year 2009-2010

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Mr MICHAEL RICHARDSON (Castle Hill) [11.53 a.m.]: The Treasurer, the Hon. Eric Roozendaal, described this budget as a beacon of hope for the people of New South Wales. It offers no hope whatsoever to the transport-starved residents of The Hills. My community has been well and truly duded by this Government in the two key areas that affect my constituents—roads and public transport. Lest members on the other side claim they are not too badly off—I listened intently to the speech made by the member for Blacktown—I remind them that my electorate is one of the worst served in relation to public transport and that as a result we have the highest dependency on cars for commuting in Sydney

Mr Frank Terenzini: How long have you been there?

Mr MICHAEL RICHARDSON: How long has the member for Maitland been in government?

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): Order! The member for Castle Hill needs no assistance.

Mr MICHAEL RICHARDSON: But the Government does. What that in turn means is that we need first-class roads to compensate for our lack of public transport, but what has this Government given us? Tollways and the Epping Road tunnel funnel. This must be the only Government in history that has spent money to make a main road less efficient. There are parts of Epping Road where a whole traffic lane has been submerged under grass—for no reason other than to force vehicles to use the tunnel. There is a cycleway that is used by perhaps 20 cyclists a day, and for much of the road there is just one general traffic lane. This is a Government that promises much and delivers little. In December 1998 it promised to build a rail line to Castle Hill. Extended in stages to Rouse Hill and metamorphosed into a \$12 billion Metro from St James, that railway was pronounced dead in the mini-budget last November. This budget officially buries it.

There is \$83 million in the budget for previously committed land acquisition along the route, but it is land acquisition for a line that this Government will never build. The extraordinary fact is that the Government has been prepared to pay up to 50 per cent more for some properties along the route of that rail line than they are worth. There have been a couple of front-page stories in my local newspapers and Channel 7 telecast a lengthy report on that issue. It is an absolute disgrace. The Government claims to be cash strapped and unable to provide infrastructure that was promised 11 years ago, yet is prepared to squander money on resuming property for a rail line that it does not intend to build.

The Government's mismanagement extends to providing windfall profits to shonky property developers. The Government provided a \$3-million windfall profit to Morgan Pacific in 2002. Morgan Pacific purchased land for \$6 million in April 2002 and six months later the Government paid more than \$9 million for it. The Government claims it does not have the money to do its job, yet it is prepared to squander money on shonky property developers, consequently making them very rich men. That is an absolute disgrace.

The Minister for Transport made very clear earlier this year that the Government will never build the rail line to Rouse Hill—a rail link that the Government promised in 1998. The Minister described the project in this place as a "white elephant". Through some of the shonkiest mathematics I have ever heard, he claimed it would cost \$14.5 billion to construct. I remind the Minister, first, that the original cost estimated for the line by the Government was less than \$600 million; second, that it was his Government that proposed the rail link; third, that his Government is still acquiring land along the corridor; and, fourth, that the line would provide additional trains needed for services along both the Epping to Chatswood line and the northern line, which has been starved of services since the Epping to Chatswood rail line was integrated into the Sydney system.

The Government also promised to build a line from Parramatta to Chatswood. The people of New South Wales received half the line at twice the price—the Epping to Chatswood half. My constituents, once again, missed out. Carlingford station, which became part of my electorate as a result of the last redistribution, is the only railway station in my electorate and the only railway station in the whole of The Hills shire. Yet its services were slashed in 2006 to just one service to the city a day and none in return. All other trains change at Clyde. The mini-budget killed off the \$42 million Rydalmere passing loop that would have meant more than one train could have operated on the line at the same time. Earlier this year the position of stationmaster at Carlingford was abolished. The station is unmanned after 10.00 a.m. The service is so bad that many of my constituents have resorted to driving to Epping.

I was interested in the comments made by the member for Blacktown about a new parking station that will be constructed in his electorate. The rail line between Epping and Chatswood will cost \$2.3 billion, but the Government has not been prepared to provide even one additional parking space at the Epping railway station. It is absolutely extraordinary. Parking at Epping station is totally insufficient, although the station has become an important junction in the Sydney system. There is funding in the budget for car parking at 28 stations but none for Epping, despite the fact that this new line was opened with a fanfare of trumpets. My constituents still find it easier to drive to Epping station to catch the train. Although they have to park 10 or 15 minutes away from the station and walk there, it is a safer trip into town than catching the train from Carlingford station.

One would think that a government that had just spent \$2.3 billion might have found a few dollars to finish the job. But not this Government—it seems pathologically incapable of doing things properly. Given that the Government seems hell-bent on forcing the people of The Hills to drive, one might think it would have spent some money on roads in our area. But not a bit of it. Showground Road connecting Old Northern Road to

Windsor Road gets nothing, despite having one of the worst safety records in the State. Less than half the \$30 million the Government wanted to spend on the V8 Supercars would have fixed this goat track. Transurban has entered into a joint partnership with the Government to widen and upgrade the M2—I might add, years after it was originally proposed. Do members know how much the Government has allocated in the budget to this essential work? It has allocated \$1 million. That means that the toll will go up by another 50¢.

The toll has just gone up from \$4.50 to \$4.95, and it will go up by another 50¢. My constituents do not have bottomless pockets. My constituents have families, mortgages and kids at school, just the same as the constituents of Government members. Yet this Government seems intent on reducing them to penury. The new M2-F3 link is critical for not only the people living along Pennant Hills Road but also the State's economy. Since the opening of the M7 in December 2005, Pennant Hills Road has become a major heavy transport artery linking the factories and warehouses of western Sydney with northern New South Wales and Queensland. Pennant Hills Road is operating beyond capacity. Its surface has been rutted and pitted by the wheels of heavy transport vehicles and its peak hour extends for much of the weekend as well as on weekdays.

The previous Federal Government commissioned a study of the options for connecting the M2 and the F3, which concluded that the best solution would be a tunnel under Pennant Hills Road. Many people disagreed with this proposition, but the fact is that something must be done before Pennant Hills Road is in permanent gridlock. What is the Government doing to facilitate matters? It is spending \$5 million of Federal money on planning the connection. That is less than 1 per cent of the \$581 million allocated for planning and land acquisitions along the route of the Rozelle metro, which even the Mayor of Leichhardt, Jamie Parker, does not want. Not one Labor councillor at this week's local government conference voted in favour of the CBD Metro. A seven-kilometre railway line that will cost more than \$5 billion is a white elephant. Surely it must be the most expensive rail line in the world. The money in this budget is allocated only for environmental assessment and design work. As the *Sydney Morning Herald* editorialised on 7 June:

For so much money, can that really be all?

The editorial further stated:

The project has been hastily flung together—

I know the member for Miranda is listening intently. These are not my words; this is what the *Sydney Morning Herald* editorial stated. It continued:

—and fits so badly with existing infrastructure that the money would be better spent on a thorough transport inquiry.

The *Sydney Morning Herald* is undertaking its own transport inquiry because the Government has refused to do the job. The Government is so paranoid about preventing the seat of Balmain from falling into the hands of the Greens that it is prepared to commit \$5 billion of taxpayers' money to a railway line that no-one wants. One shudders to think what the deficit would be were the Government to commit to this sort of expenditure in every one of its 53 seats. The deficit is high enough, even with Rudd Government stimulus spending. A government that has enjoyed more than \$17 billion of unbudgeted revenue flowing into its coffers over the past 14 years has suddenly plunged into the red—a \$1.337 billion deficit this year, compared with a projected \$268 million surplus. That is a turnaround of more than \$1.6 billion. How could the Government have got it so wrong back in June last year? Now it is projecting a \$990 million deficit next year, a \$116 million deficit in 2011-12 and a return to surplus the following year. That will be despite an unemployment rate that is predicted to climb to 8.5 per cent, cutting payroll tax, and GST revenues.

How will the Government achieve this miraculous sleight of hand? It will do it by cutting costs. Overall cost increases are projected to fall from 8 per cent to just 2.9 per cent when the average increase over the past 12 years has been 5.9 per cent. The Government plans to merge 160 government departments and agencies into 13 super departments and claims that this will save money. However, it has declined to spell out how and whose jobs will go as a consequence. As Andrew Clennell said in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, there are some "heroic assumptions" in this budget about the years to come. Without Rudd Government stimulus funding, the deficit for 2008-09 would have been \$2 billion and next year it would be \$4.4 billion, rather than the projected \$990 million. Nevertheless, under this Government, the State's net financial liabilities will blow out from \$57 billion to \$105 billion in 2013.

To put this into perspective, that is as much as the budget black hole that Peter Costello was bequeathed by the Keating Government in 1996, not for just one State but for the whole of Australia. Here is another heroic

assumption. The budget papers state that economic growth this financial year was zero and project a 0.5 per cent fall in growth in 2009-10, rebounding to 2.25 per cent growth in 2010-11. How will this be achieved, given rising levels of unemployment? Will New South Wales really be the first State to go into recession and the first State to come out of recession, and if so why? I concede that there are some stimulatory measures in this budget. As members would be keenly aware—we had to provide the supporting information on these projects only this week—the Government has provided \$300,000 or \$400,000 per electorate for community projects. These projects will have to be completed by December 2010, just three months before the election.

I am sure the Government would have it that the date was picked to ensure that the money was spent expeditiously, but the more cynical amongst us might say that it will be a first-class opportunity for photo opportunities for the Premier and his Ministers. There is also the halving of stamp duty on new homes valued at up to \$600,000 until the end of this year. This will unquestionably stimulate the housing market, but many people are starting to question the wisdom of doing so when it simply inflates house prices. As I said earlier in another debate, we have seen the feeding frenzy that resulted from the combination of low interest rates and the boost to the First Home Owner Grant. That is in no-one's interests. Ultimately the day of reckoning will come, just as it will come for the Rudd Government's expenditure and borrowings. That money must be paid back.

If house prices fall, if the unemployment rate reaches the 8.5 per cent predicted by the Government in this budget, and if rates rise, we will end up with foreclosures on many first homeowners' homes, and that will be absolutely tragic for the first home buyers and for New South Wales. What we are talking about here is short-term gain and long-term pain. Ultimately, the State's economic position will depend on our competitiveness both internationally and against other States. The fact is that we are not competitive, whether in terms of infrastructure, house prices or State taxes. We pay \$2,528 per capita in State taxes—more than any other State bar Western Australia. Our payroll tax rate is 6 per cent with a threshold of \$623,000, and it is scheduled to fall to 5.5 per cent by 1 January 2011. This compares with 4.75 per cent and a threshold of \$1 million in Queensland, and 4.95 per cent and a threshold of \$550,000 in Victoria.

So I ask: If one wanted to set up a new business or establish the Australian headquarters of an overseas company in Australia, where would one go? One would not go to Sydney because one would not want to spend that sort of money. Yet that is precisely the sort of economic activity this State needs: real jobs, real incomes, and real wealth generation. The Opposition has proposed—and I endorse this—a 1.5 per cent payroll tax cut to attract those sorts of businesses and economic activities to this State. The Treasurer said that jobs were at the heart of this budget but there is precious little evidence of that. The fact that in recent years New South Wales has lost two Federal seats to Queensland should have been a wake-up call to the Government, but it seems to be oblivious to reality. New South Wales' share of the national economic pie continues to shrink even faster than our share of the national population.

Castle Hill is not the only electorate to suffer from a misallocation of resources. Many of my constituents travel to the Blue Mountains for the day or on weekend visits, or cross the mountains to the vineyards at Mudgee. Of course, there are two routes across the mountains: the original route, the Great Western Highway, and the subsequent Bell's Line of Road. If we look at the budget papers we find that \$115 million is allocated to the Great Western Highway—the greatest amount of roads funding allocated to any electorate in the State—although much of it is Federal funds. The question is: Will the people of the Blue Mountains benefit from it? Is this what they want? While some may welcome the highway upgrade, many of them will see it as an encouragement for semitrailers and B-doubles to use the road, destroying the tranquillity of the mountain villages. If the Government surveyed mountain residents, I am sure it would find that the majority of them would reject this approach in favour of upgrading the Bell's Line of Road to make it the major route across the mountains for through traffic.

One can compare the Government's woolly-headed thinking on this issue with the way in which it is pushing ahead with the Rozelle metro against the advice of everyone else in the State. This is not a government that is responsive to reasoned argument. It makes sense to use the unpopulated route—that is, the Bell's Line of Road—for through traffic and to keep the Great Western Highway for tourist and mountains traffic. But sense is not a commodity in great supply in the Rees Government. The mountains have also recently been included in what is known as the extended regulated area for waste, which means that residents will be subject to the waste levy. According to the budget, the Government intends to collect \$348 million from the levy in 2009-10, which is up 36 per cent on four years ago and is an increase of \$246 million on five years ago. This is unquestionably the fastest-growing tax in New South Wales. Of that money, the Government intends to return \$19.8 million, or 5.7 per cent, to councils by way of so-called waste performance bonus. That bonus is an absolute sham.

Earlier this year I discovered through a freedom of information application that every council in the greater regulated area this year is to get back \$2.39 per resident in waste performance bonus, regardless of performance. In 2008 Liverpool recycled 14 per cent of its waste and it will get \$2.39 for each resident. In 2008 Hunters Hill recycled 88 per cent of its waste and will also receive \$2.39 for each resident. In 2008 Cessnock City Council, which dumped 27,000 tonnes of waste in landfill—an increase from 14,000 tonnes in 2005-06—still got a bonus. That is what this Government calls a waste performance bonus. Clearly, the bonus has nothing to do with performance. [*Extension of time agreed to.*]

I remind the Government that in 1999 it promised to hypothecate 55 per cent—not 5.7 per cent—of the waste levy to waste avoidance reduction and re-use programs. One has to ask whether kerbside recycling is working. According to the budget papers, it is not working. The amount of dry waste being recycled per capita has remained static over the past four years at 108 kilograms, which means that the amount of waste generated continues to increase as the population of New South Wales increases. Overall, 2.6 per cent more waste was sent to landfill in the greater Sydney region last year than in the previous year. Yet this Government has committed itself to recycling 66 per cent of municipal waste and 63 per cent of commercial industrial waste by 2014. To achieve that goal the amount of waste going to landfill will have to go down, not up. The trouble is that the Labor Government is addicted to waste—and why not, given that the revenues it collects from waste are greater than the combined proceeds of the health insurance levy, the insurance protection tax and the parking space levy, which is to double this year courtesy of the mini-budget? The health insurance levy, the insurance protection tax and the parking space levy combined do not amount to as much as the waste tax.

Whether it is illegal dumping or armed robbery, the law is only as good as the ability to enforce it, and The Hills is significantly under resourced when it comes to police. The Hills is one of the fastest-growing areas in this State, and has been for many years. But the number of police has failed to keep pace with this increase, despite growth in many areas of crime. For example, in the two years to December last year, the number of non-domestic assaults in The Hills shire was up by 22.9 per cent, to 434; indecent assaults by 41.2 per cent, to 72; burglaries by 23 per cent, to 913; shoplifting incidents by 33.8 per cent, to 388; and fraud by 22.8 per cent, to 716. I might add that The Hills has also had some massive drug seizures. I believe the largest drug seizure in Australian history occurred at Castle Hill, where some people rented a unit at an industrial estate, no doubt thinking it was a quiet area and they would not be discovered. Fortunately, they were discovered—but not by the local police.

Last year I called on the Government to provide 21 additional officers for Castle Hill police station based on the fact that Castle Hill has just one general duties police officer per 3,851 residents compared with the State average of one to 1,103. According to Police Association figures, this meant that a general duties constable in The Hills had to deal with 603 incidents a year compared with the State average of 394 incidents. The Government subsequently provided approximately 10 additional probationary constables, but the police station still lacks the experienced officers, and especially the detectives, needed to deal with the increased levels of crime—particularly given that the new officers only replaced those lost by the command since the March 2007 State election.

In previous years I have described budgets as being lost opportunities—and so they were. With all the rivers of gold flooding into the State's coffers, it was the time to invest in the State's infrastructure and, by so doing, improve our competitiveness and economic efficiency. That this Government demonstrably failed to do that is an indictment of it and on the Labor Party. The Keynesian approach of borrowing to increase spending during economic hard times does not preclude spending money earned during the boom times. Yet, as Michael Egan used to say, this is every inch a Labor Government, every inch a Labor budget—and Labor governments seem woefully unable to cope with prosperity. While the Howard Government not only paid off the Commonwealth's debt but put money into the Future Fund to help pay for public servants' superannuation, this Government squandered its opportunities and now faces an extremely uncertain financial future. Unfortunately, the people of New South Wales must also pay the price for the Government's failure, and the people of The Hills seem to be paying more than most in New South Wales.

Mr ROBERT COOMBS (Swansea) [12.17 p.m.]: Unlike the member for Castle Hill, I shall not be painting a picture of doom and gloom. The member for Castle Hill would have one believe that in Sydney or in any town in the State communities are wracked by unemployment, businesses closing down, and so on. But that is not the case at all. One cannot make a fair assessment of the New South Wales budget without taking into account a number of events that have occurred on the international scene. In the past couple of years we have had a financial crisis and a sub-prime housing crisis that has led to a crash in property values across the world—and certainly in the developed world—which has had a massive impact on equities.

We have witnessed the massive downward slide in values and equities in the financial capitals of the world. Australia has largely been able to overcome the horrors experienced in some overseas countries. Unemployment is currently about 6 per cent, which is not too bad. Sydney, as the financial capital of Australia, has made a large contribution to that percentage. It is one reason why unemployment in New South Wales has been slightly higher than that in other States. Sydney's financial services have taken the hit and that has contributed significantly to unemployment levels.

New South Wales has some very good economic indicators. Government members have spoken previously about our triple-A credit rating. People from other countries have difficulty accepting that rating, although they would gladly accept our economic position. Interest rates have been at an all-time low but are now starting to turn the corner and rise again. Any comparison with the past three or four decades reveals that interest rates are still low. Fuel is half the price it was two years ago, and hopefully that pricing arrangement can be maintained. Inflation fluctuates between 2.5 per cent and 3 per cent. Again, in comparison with national and international transitions, that is a very good rate.

The international scene is a terrible story of woe. Our trading partners in the United States of America and various European countries are experiencing unemployment rates of over 10 per cent—some are as high as 15 per cent. People cannot afford to keep their homes and must simply walk away from them. People have lost enormous amounts of money on speculating, superannuation funds and so on. One reason why Australia has been successful is that governments, both past and present, have ensured that the Australian financial industry is regulated. Governments have ensured that the banking and credit systems of the big banks—which are commonly referred to as the "four pillars"—are subject to a pretty rigorous regulation system. It is encouraging to hear people, including Barack Obama and other leaders in the Western world, say that their countries are undertaking the necessary assessment to ensure that banking and financial regulations are increased significantly to try to stop a similar crash occurring in future. Both sides of this Parliament would support that approach in an endeavour to ensure that the misery of the past two years is never experienced again.

I turn now to the New South Wales budget. No-one could say that the New South Wales budget stands alone. We are subject to international pressures, and a number of international doctrines, agreements and arrangements—such as international trade agreements—basically tie us to what occurs internationally. A crash, a movement or a correction on Wall Street or in the financial capitals of London, Paris or Tokyo will have an impact here. It is nonsense to claim that the New South Wales Government is entirely responsible for some of our economic conditions.

On 16 June 2009 the Treasurer outlined in the State budget our financial position and the way forward. We listened intently to the Leader of the Opposition in his reply to the Treasurer's Budget Speech. But it was full of wind and fluff. It was not costed, it was rhetorical and it did not set out regulations and provisions. There was no understanding of how the Leader of the Opposition would take New South Wales forward. For example, how will New South Wales continue to be a place where business wants to invest and how will it give the required economic support to its residents? The budget was a good one. It helped us retain our triple-A credit rating and, although we have gone into deficit, it has costings in place that will see us back in surplus shortly. I am confident the budget will ensure that New South Wales moves forward. I turn now to the electorate of Swansea, which did pretty well in the budget.

Mr Paul Pearce: Because of the quality of the member.

Mr ROBERT COOMBS: I thank the member for Coogee for that statement. Nevertheless, others will judge that. Of course, the budget is underpinned by a \$62 billion spend, which will support tens of thousands of jobs. Another major plank of the budget, which was mentioned by the member for Castle Hill—and it is one that I am very excited about—is \$35 million for the New South Wales Community Building Program. All members are currently undertaking work to try to prioritise applications for significant improvements and support community organisations to ensure that they have the halls, playing fields or meeting places they need.

At a glance, we can see the budget provides \$8.1 million for the maintenance of the Swansea road network, including \$1 million for repairs and maintenance of Swansea Bridge. That bridge has needed maintenance for the past 15 years. The Roads and Traffic Authority has recognised the important transport role that the bridge plays and has worked tirelessly to ensure that the appropriate and necessary maintenance and repair program is in place. Some \$1 million is available this financial year. As we speak, contractors are ensuring that the bridge's opening mechanism continues to work and that the bridge remains intact and operating in accordance with the code.

That allocation complements the large amounts of funding allocated in previous years. The Colongra gas turbine facility has been allocated \$43.4 million. In these days of environment and climate change, with governments doing what they can to ensure abatement of carbon pollution, it is important to recognise real public investment in gas turbine facilities that provide an alternative to coal-fired electricity generation. The facility has created a number of jobs, and the total program is worth approximately \$200 million. Every time I visit that important facility I see many people hard at work. It has provided jobs and, just as importantly, will form part of an electricity program and be a source of electricity in the future.

The budget has allocated \$4.26 million for the continued upgrade of Floraville Public School, including administration-staff facilities, a new library, a new communal hall, six new classrooms and two special program rooms. I visited the school last week. The teaching staff, the parents and citizens association, the mums and dads and the students are very excited and enthusiastic about the program that is underway. The wonderful Floraville Public School is a very important community asset. The current work complements a number of projects initiated under the Building the Education Revolution program, which indicates that we really are experiencing an education revolution. I cannot remember, and in speaking to other people I find they cannot remember, a time when such an enormous and significant amount of money has been provided by both the State and Federal governments for education facilities. It really is a marvellous thing that is taking place and something that I am sure we all commend.

The amount of \$1.56 million has been provided for upgrades to social housing, \$1.72 million for community transport and support, and \$264,000 for three clinical support officers for Belmont Hospital to enable doctors and nurses to spend less time on paperwork and more time caring for patients. Health, of course, is one of the major responsibilities of the State Government, and it is wonderful to see the hospital in my electorate, Belmont Hospital, operating so well. The budget before last allocated \$31 million for a new wing to be built at the hospital. That has been completed. I have been there and spoken to the general manager and staff of the facility and they are really happy with the new wing. It has enabled them to increase significantly the provision of health services to the residents of the Swansea area. They are doing a marvellous job in what can only be described as a world-class facility.

I have referred to some of the improvements that have occurred in our schools, such as new halls, libraries, classrooms and like, but there is also a significant amount of money in this year's budget to provide for toilet upgrades at Belmont North Public School, Jewells Public School, Belmont High School and Swansea Public School. A new roof is scheduled for Nords Wharf Public School and a stormwater upgrade will take place at Jewells Public School.

Also, \$300,000 has been allocated for dredging the Swansea Channel. My electorate is Swansea and I am not sure that it is appropriately named because people say, "You come from Swansea." I come from the town of Swansea and I am speaking specifically about the town in these comments. Swansea is basically seen as the gateway to Lake Macquarie. The dredging will complement the badging we are trying to achieve for the town of Swansea. It is very important and a number of people who own boats or yachts in the area have campaigned for this for a long time. It will provide a navigable canal of about 3.5 to 4 metres depth from the Pacific Ocean to Lake Macquarie, a route of two or three nautical miles. It will mean that some of the local yachting clubs will be able to continue to promote their summer programs and regattas. It will also bring important tourist dollars to the area and it will provide a safe and navigable passage for those larger boats that come to the area.

At present there is a big mound of sand there. Work has already started. Consultations are currently taking place between the Department of Lands and Lake Macquarie Council and things are looking good for a further \$160,000 being allocated to the current dredging program, financed on a 50:50 basis by Lands and Lake Macquarie Council. That will ensure a quality job that should last for a couple of years. People should understand that a continuous shoaling pattern occurs in the channel, so it will require a long-term solution. However, the project that is underway should see us through the next three, four or even five years. I am very keen to enter into negotiations with users and Lake Macquarie Council to get a more permanent solution. There is no doubt that user groups have campaigned for a considerable period to have a dredge permanently in Swansea. I have already reminded the Department of Lands that I see this as a marvellous asset to the area. I think the mayor of Lake Macquarie Council and others will join me in trying to achieve the objective I have referred to. I can report that initial consultations and discussions can only be described as positive at present.

Despite all the doom and gloom that comes from the other side of the House, another positive initiative is what this Government has done to encourage first home buyers to enter a difficult housing market. An

initiative in the State budget is the Housing Construction Acceleration Plan. Under this plan a 50 per cent cut in stamp duty is available for the purchase of new homes up to \$600,000. This adds up to a maximum saving of \$11,245. Coupled with other rebates available under the existing first home buyers grant scheme, savings of up to \$41,990 can be claimed, of which \$27,990 is New South Wales funded and \$14,000 is Commonwealth funded. In all, it is a good budget. There is no doubt at all that people will try to politicise it for the wrong reasons. It provides the necessary support for investment to take place, for jobs to continue and for New South Wales to be seen as a good place to live and work. I commend the 2009-10 budget to the House.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [12.36 p.m.]: The State budget was brought down in Parliament on 16 June 2009. This is the third State budget that I have witnessed, as well as the disastrous mini-budget. I can only say that it is hard not to be critical when my initial expectation was for a true and accurate record of the future spending of this Government, an expectation that I am sure was shared by all State residents. The process commences, from the Opposition's point of view—with no involvement in its preparation—with the Treasurer making his Budget Speech in the Legislative Assembly. The Budget Speech has only one purpose: to attract the ear of the media. After consideration of the last four such speeches I note that the speechwriter appears to rehash the last Budget Speech and introduce a few new catchphrases and keywords to make the process appear feisty and believable. Jobs and infrastructure should be key components of a strong State, plus some resources devoted to struggling families with measured offers that provide hope. This has not been the case. By carefully limiting spending parameters with time limits and red tape the budget provides maximum media impact with limited cost to the Government.

After the Budget Speech the Premier and Treasurer pal up to the media to make sure they are placed in a favourable light with the public. This year the Government is going to spend \$24 million to tell the residents of New South Wales how lucky they are to have such a great forward-thinking and caring Government. The real deception is played out in the budget document itself. This year the budget announcement is full of the Federal Government's stimulus funding which has been blended into the State effort, which is measly and truly reflective of the State's financial woes. But, aside from this deception, the crudest and most misleading process is the continual re-announcement of past planned expenditures from previous budgets that could, by accident, be spent in the future. Thus we retain the triple-A credit rating, which is only brought about by the fact that the Government is not spending the money that it has promised. It has been able to retain the triple-A credit rating only by that means.

Aside from the funds committed by the Government to provide essential services, all other announcements are subject to change and can be axed at any time. Based on the Government's past performances, one should not be confident that its much-publicised Metro project will go ahead. It is a case of believing it when we see it. When the Premier is asked when a project will be finished he uses his favourite saying, "How long is a piece of string?" I am amazed that members of the media continue to support this flawed process and that they show no interest in exposing this budget and past budgets for the shonky documents that they are.

My experience in the business world leaves me in awe of this Government's ability to conduct business in this manner. It is nothing short of a disgrace and it should not be tolerated. To all intents and purposes, in the real world this Government should have no excessive borrowings because most of the promised funding is never spent. The process this Government follows is not dissimilar to the process followed by shady investment companies that declare big earnings on their investments at the end of each trading period in the hope that things might improve and that they might be able to afford this announced dividend. When I became a member of Parliament I was amazed at the amount of criticism that was levelled at members of the Coalition regarding the distribution of GST revenue. I would have thought that it would have been a major component of budgetary spending.

When the Australian Labor Party was elected federally this Government could not broker as good a deal as it had in the past. In fact, it went backwards, which was amazing. Bob Carr, who thought he was the greatest genius of all time, negotiated a deal that resulted in this Government being slaughtered. Following Premiers and Treasurers have been treated with disdain, as another \$800 million in GST revenue has been lost to the State. Another interesting \$16 billion allocation in this budget relates to health. Not one area health service in my electorate has escaped this Government's budgetary cuts. In one year an area health service might have a shortfall of 5 per cent or 6 per cent, which is rolled into its budget for the next year. We do not know what amount of money will be available to be spent on health in 2009-10 because we do not know how much of this year's money will be spent providing for the shortfalls of previous years.

This Labor budget is the greatest cover-up of all time. The major part of the health budget is consumed by this grey area—something that was clearly evident when a freedom of information request was made to establish the budget of the Greater Western Area Health Service. Information on the documents that Opposition members received had been blanked out. Obviously, this Government is continuing to cover up the massive rolled-over area health service shortfall. We will never get to the bottom of this matter unless we have honest and transparent government. If the Liberal-Nationals Coalition wins government at the next election I am sure that would be one of the areas in which it would find a massive funding shortfall.

This Government's announcement of the \$400,000 Building the Community Fund gave organisations in the Murray-Darling electorate an opportunity to apply for that funding. I received nearly 200 applications from organisations in my electorate—a clear indication of a lack of support by this Government. The fact that 400 organisations applied for a portion of that funding reveals their degree of desperation. Many of this Government's announced projects will not go ahead and there will be much disappointment in the community. Recently it was announced that western New South Wales had the lowest economic growth rate in the State—an obvious area of concern for the Government, which is keen to stimulate the New South Wales economy. Perhaps the Government should stimulate the economy in this area of greatest need to bring it up to the level of the economies in other parts of the State. This Government has a responsibility to ensure that that occurs.

This Government has done an excellent job of transferring to Victoria its responsibilities for cross-border health services in the southern part of my electorate. There has been much criticism about the level of health services provided in each State. Residents in New South Wales are continually seeking health services in Victoria because they are nearer and more readily available. Meetings were held recently in Tocumwal at which residents sought the establishment of an ambulance service that I believe they should have. The community is supportive of an ambulance service and there is a demonstrated demand for that service. For too long the New South Wales Government has relied on Cobram in Victoria to provide an ambulance service to meet the needs of residents in New South Wales.

I refer next to this Government's most recent announcement of the closure of the Dalwood Assessment Centre in Seaforth, which is an amazing feat. The closure of that centre will guarantee that children in regional and rural New South Wales are denied services that are available in the city and in major regional centres. They will no longer be able to be assessed or be given appropriate remedial treatment to ensure that they are better educated. The principals in my electorate, who are supportive of this centre, which has been in operation for a long time, have been fairly vocal about the need to retain it. The Government proposes to shut down this facility in Seaforth for only one reason—to cash in on it. The money will go into a big black hole and this Government will spend it on trying to win office at the next election.

The services that have been enjoyed for so many years will be lost and the money that will be gained from the closure of that facility will be wasted on advertising the great worth of this Labor Government. Children will now have to be assessed in Sydney. After each assessment they will return to their rural and remote areas, where I doubt that they will be able to obtain the services of speech therapists or child psychologists. They will not receive the specialist medical services that they enjoyed at this facility, and they will not receive trained assistance to help them with their remediation. The Government proposes to close down this centre and to cash in on a valuable asset. This Labor budget is all about spin. Murray-Darling students now will not have the opportunity to access this remedial service, which has done a great job over the years.

Another interesting issue within the Murray-Darling electorate is the continual removal of public service jobs, particularly from Fisheries. Closing the Broken Hill Fisheries office now has provided the opportunity for increased poaching on the Darling River, to such an extent that many constituents visit my office regularly to complain about illegal fishing activities. Clearly, the Government's decision was solely for monetary gain and not because demand did not warrant the service. The Department of Water and Energy has removed so many of its Deniliquin staff that the office no longer has a receptionist. Customers entering the office must press a button and, with a bit of luck, someone will respond. Hopefully, the person the customer wants to see is present. Broken Hill courthouse staff numbers have been reduced. The remaining courthouse staff have been given extra duties created by recent changes that removed funds from the Sydney office to cover the staff shortage in the regions. These decisions are all about cost savings.

The promise of Government funding to completely seal the Silver City Highway from Broken Hill to Tibooburra is a bit like *Blue Hills*: it keeps coming. With a little bit of effort and not a lot of money that highway could be sealed completely and we could get on with business. A section of the Menindee to Pooncarie Road also remains unsealed. Recently I witnessed two incidents in 48 hours in which vehicles driven by tourists

not skilled in driving on an unsealed road lost control and rolled. These continual accidents present major problems also for those who need to travel along the road. The Arumpo Road runs from Buronga to Mungo National Park, which is an important tourist area. The Government wants to close this national park. It insists that the spin-off from that closure will benefit everyone locally and it will be great for tourists. The reality is that when the park is closed no infrastructure is available for tourist access. Locking up national parks causes much grief for shires in my electorate because they immediately lose forever rate revenue they have received historically. The Government bought Booligal Station believing tourists would visit the station, but tourism has not increased in the Hay region.

The Deniliquin Renal Dialysis Unit is still to come into existence, while patient numbers requiring treatment increase. It is only a matter of time before crisis level is reached. This Government recognised that this process needed addressing but has continued to put it on the backburner. However, to the Government's credit, the capacity of the Broken Hill renal dialysis unit was increased to meet the needs of local residents, who previously were forced to leave their families and reside in Adelaide to receive treatment. That was one of the wins for the region. Menindee's augmented sewerage system has been a contentious issue to residents. The current septic tank system could overflow at any time, resulting in significant health problems. When Kevin Rudd visited the historical Aboriginal Toomelah mission he was alarmed to see sewage on the ground. He demanded that Minister Lynch install a sewerage system to meet the needs of Toomelah. Kevin Rudd might demand the same outcome for Menindee residents because the current septic system cannot cope.

Much has been said about increased public housing resulting from the Federal Government stimulus package. That increase probably is occurring in eastern New South Wales because public housing in our area either has been sold to private operators or otherwise disposed of. The Federal Government's stimulus package was a big help to builders in eastern New South Wales and certainly would have helped western New South Wales. We have not enjoyed any benefit from it.

Mr TONY STEWART (Bankstown) [12.56 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to strongly support the Rees Government's budget, which delivers for the people of New South Wales and certainly for the people of Bankstown, who are proud to be part of the many infrastructure and service delivery opportunities this budget puts into place. Importantly, this budget was set in the midst of a world economic crisis. It understands the need to deliver opportunities and focuses particularly on job creation by creating over 160,000 jobs through infrastructure improvements. Certainly, this will make the future for New South Wales families, particularly those in the Bankstown electorate, much better because we are investing in the future of this State by providing opportunities to families through infrastructure.

Bankstown is a big winner in the budget because it invests in local priorities to help build a better future for our community. This budget is a stimulus for Bankstown but, importantly, for New South Wales. Bankstown, being a key part of the south-western region of Sydney, is part of the engine room that drives the New South Wales economy through jobs and industry infrastructure. Importantly, a number of those infrastructure investments include \$5 million to upgrade local roads and implement traffic management programs, and \$2.17 million for upgrades to local schools under the Principals Priority Building Program. Of course, that program is separate from the Infrastructure Incentive Program on which we work in partnership with the Federal Government, providing numerous projects in addition to those already provided through this budget infrastructure.

The budget allocates \$4.3 million for rail maintenance, including maintenance of embankments and cuttings, bridge painting, installation of new overhead wiring and important track infrastructure. The budget also provides \$7.22 million to meet housing needs in my electorate, including the construction of 24 homes in the Greenacre district as part of stage one of the Nation Building Economic Stimulus Plan, and \$4.78 million to upgrade social housing dwellings. That allocation will result in big improvements in social housing in my electorate. The budget also provides \$1.19 million to support clinical service officers at the Bankstown Hospital, which does an amazing job in the western Sydney region. In my view, the Bankstown Hospital, which benefits from community input and support, exemplifies what is the best in health care in the State.

The budget allocates \$248,000 for two full-time and one part-time clinical initiative nurses to provide care and treatment in the Bankstown Hospital's emergency department. The hospital proudly records statistics that demonstrate it is delivering in response to the expectations of the people of New South Wales, particularly the people who live in my electorate. I compliment the Treasurer, the Hon. Eric Roozendaal, on presenting such a well-formulated budget that will do a great deal to create jobs and a better future for New South Wales. The Treasurer stated in his budget speech:

The NSW Government is building for the future in local communities despite the tough economic times.

That is exactly the point I have been making. The Treasurer went on to state:

\$62.9 billion is being invested across NSW over the next four years in the biggest building program in our State's history supporting up to 160,000 jobs.

This is a major stimulus which invests in the future of our economy.

The budget provides education facilities and support for my electorate and defines what a well-formulated State budget means to local people. The budget allocates \$182,000 to the Banksia Road Public School for security fencing, which is something that the school community has been requesting for some time. I am pleased to have worked with the school community to deliver improvements in response to that need. I applaud the parents and citizens association for constructively presenting its case to me on a number of occasions. I also thank the Minister for Education and Training, Verity Firth, for listening carefully and for delivering in response to that need. The budget also allocates \$400,000 for toilet upgrades at the Bankstown Girls High School and \$400,000 for toilet upgrades at the Bankstown North Public School. I am pleased that the Government has delivered in response to those requirements through its budget. The Government also has allocated \$550,000 for roof replacement and new guttering at the Bass High School as part of its budget program.

In addition, the budget allocates \$300,000 for toilet upgrades at the Bass Hill Public School and \$525,000 for roof replacement at the Banksia Road Public School, which will celebrate its fiftieth anniversary on Saturday. I compliment the Banksia Road Public School on being a centre for educational excellence. I am very proud to have the school in my electorate and I am sure the budget allocation will go a long way towards assisting the school to achieve its goals. The school's principal, Jennifer Eggins, is doing a great job and is an outstanding leader. She has been able to demonstrate what can be achieved through public education at the school. The school boasts several prominent graduates, not the least of whom is Lenny Pascoe, one of the most famous first grade cricketers that Australia has ever produced. Lenny, Steve Waugh, Mark Waugh and Jeff Thomson have put Bankstown on the map as far as the cricket world is concerned.

The budget allocates \$5 million in road funding to my electorate. Of that amount, \$3.6 million has been allocated for maintenance of the Bankstown roads network, \$832,000 has been allocated for traffic and transport management, and \$539,000 has been allocated for road safety programs. In addition, \$658,000 has been provided for the maintenance of traffic lights and signs. An allocation of \$500,000 has been made for upgrading the intersection of Rookwood Road, Davies Lane and George Street, Bankstown, which is very important because it is so close to the Bankstown North Public School. The upgrade is needed to address safety issues associated with schoolchildren crossing the road at the intersection. I conducted an inspection of the traffic conditions with the principal, representatives from the parents and citizens association, officials from the Roads and Traffic Authority and officials from the Bankstown City Council. As a result, a plan was forged to upgrade the intersection to address not only traffic needs but, more importantly, to address the safety of young students who attend the Bankstown North Public School. I applaud the Minister for allocating funds to address those needs.

In addition \$770,000 has been allocated to upgrading the road surface of the Hume Highway from Woodville Road to Miller Road. Recently I inspected the roadworks with the Minister for Finance, Minister for Infrastructure, Minister for Regulatory Reform, and Minister for Ports and Waterways, Joe Tripodi, who is in the Chamber. We announced the upgrade very proudly because we both know the importance of those upgrade works. They have been delivered because the Minister and I have worked in partnership to ensure that the works are carried out on schedule and within budget. The budget also provides \$112,000 for councils to maintain their local road networks, and that funding is greatly appreciated by the Bankstown City Council. In addition, \$62,000 has been allocated for traffic management work, including the construction of new cycleways and pedestrian crossings, and the budget also provides for routine works to be carried out.

In response to the transport needs of my electorate, the Government has allocated \$4.34 million for rail maintenance on top of rail maintenance work that has already been undertaken, such as the upgrading of the Bankstown railway station and the Bankstown bus interchange that cost approximately \$8.5 million. Those improvements mean that not only do the people of Bankstown have a better interchange facility but also that the Chapel Road bridge, which was part of the old plaza area, has been reopened to bus traffic. That serves two purposes: bus traffic now moves more freely, and the Bankstown Plaza end of the central business district has reopened. Historically, a rail line divided Bankstown. Centro Bankstown is on one side of the rail line and is a thriving shopping centre, but on the other side of the rail line a number of smaller shops struggle to survive. Traffic was rerouted to direct customers to the smaller shopping area, thereby achieving a better commercial balance. The budget creates many opportunities for addressing transport needs. I am very pleased that the Government has recognised the transport needs of my electorate as a priority.

The budget will result in the delivery of many new homes in the Bankstown electorate. That meets an important need in my electorate, which has a very high demand for housing, particularly public housing provided by the Department of Housing. People on the lower socioeconomic scale in my electorate are struggling and look to the Department of Housing to provide accommodation infrastructure. The need for public housing in my electorate is probably greater than is the need in most other electorates of New South Wales. The priority given to my electorate by the Rees Government is greatly appreciated. The budget allocates \$7.2 million for the construction of 24 new homes in Greenacre as part of the Government's overall infrastructure program. That is a great example of how the Government works and how it provides facilities for the people of Bankstown. The budget allocates \$4.87 million for maintenance and upgrades for social housing homes as well as \$2.13 million to complete seven homes for disadvantaged people in Bass Hill. The provision of accommodation for disadvantaged people responds to a great need that exists in my electorate. I am very proud that the Rees Government has responded unequivocally to addressing that need.

The budget provides for so many projects that there are too many for me to mention during the time allotted. All the matters I have mentioned had been reiterated publicly to my constituents through local media outlets. I emphasise that I am very proud to work in partnership with the Rees Government to deliver services and facilities for the people of Bankstown. While my constituents would not suggest that they deserve more from the budget than constituents of any other electorate, they appreciate allocations that are fair and reasonable. As their State Parliament representative, I certainly do my best to deliver Government services to address their needs.

I make special mention of some concerns that have emerged as a result of a draft report of the Productivity Commission. An important part of the formulation of a budget that delivers for New South Wales is recognition of the contribution made by non-government organisations. Members would be aware that \$1 billion is contributed by clubs and pubs through gaming revenue. I was amazed to discover, as I am sure many other members were, that the draft report of the Productivity Commission recommends measures that literally will halve revenue from clubs and pubs not only in the Bankstown electorate but also in electorates throughout New South Wales. Such a measure will have a devastating effect on the opportunities for employment in my electorate.

As an illustration of the point I make, I cite the example of the Bankstown Sports Club, which provides employment for 550 people and is a very significant enterprise. Obviously the employment is provided as a result of gaming revenue, but importantly the club and other clubs, such as the Revesby Workers Club, the Bankstown RSL and the Canterbury Leagues Club, play a very important community role. They all deliver important community infrastructure. Indeed, last week I learnt that clubs alone provided about \$844 million worth of infrastructure in the community from gaming revenue. That is revenue that provided sporting and social infrastructure, aged needs infrastructure and so on. That should not be discounted.

The Productivity Commission report surprised me in that it seems to say that technology exists that enables Australia's 125,000 problem gamblers to be dealt with through advanced technology or suppression of gaming. It is a ridiculous notion. The commission simply does not recognise that problem gamblers are people with an addictive sickness. They cannot be removed from gambling proportionally and re-educated not to gamble significantly. These people will gamble in any way that is available to them. By focussing simply on poker machines, the Productivity Commission is, by and large, putting its head in the sand and not recognising the overall issue that needs to be dealt with, that is, that problem gamblers need assistance. However, they do not need assistance by reducing the level of gambling available to them in their local environment; they need assistance through support, understanding and counselling.

Problem gamblers have an addictive sickness that will not go away. It cannot be dealt with by diminishing the ways in which people can gamble. I am concerned because 0.7 per cent of 1 per cent of the total population are problem gamblers yet changes recommended by the Productivity Commission will affect more than 99 per cent of the population who want to gamble recreationally in a responsible and accountable framework. I will take this matter up with the Minister for Gaming and Racing and with the Premier's office, because I am concerned that the focus and direction of the report of the Productivity Commission is out of step with reality. The Productivity Commission appears to have ignored Internet gambling. These days Internet gambling is significant, yet the commission did not make any recommendations about it. A person could gamble their house away on the Internet, but the Productivity Commission is not concerned about that. However, if a person spends \$50 on a poker machine, the whole world as we know it will end. It defies reality. The commission should confront the reality in my local area.

I would welcome a visit by Productivity Commission representatives to Bankstown to look at infrastructure provided by clubs such as Bankstown Sports Club. I remind the Productivity Commission that clubs are mutual societies. They do not exist to make profits for an individual; they exist to support and represent, in the case of Bankstown Sports Club, more than 50,000 members. Those members recognise that the club provides them with a secure venue to enjoy recreational activities and a subsidised dinner. And why should they not have that? The draft report of the Productivity Commission states that clubs provide valuable community benefits through support for community activities, but that it is unclear that the benefit delivered is sufficient to warrant the concessional gaming tax treatments, given their impact on competitive neutrality. That is amazing.

As I said, Bankstown Sports Club, for example, provides 550 jobs, undertakes numerous infrastructure projects and funds many charities, as do other clubs. Many pubs also provide infrastructure for the community. They dig deep and help sports teams and local hospitals. The revenue does not go into one person's pocket, but the Productivity Commission does not seem to recognise that. If these recommendations are taken forward they will have a devastating impact on my electorate. I hope that there is a real understanding of the clubs industry and its importance to the State's economy. Importantly, the Productivity Commission must recognise the reality that the industry has checked itself. All pubs and clubs have harm-minimisation measures in place. It is important to recognise that at-risk gamblers—they are not problem gamblers; problem gamblers will never be cured—must have an opportunity to take a breath, be made accountable and be given counselling where necessary to enable them to see that they might become addicted to gambling if they continue to gamble in their troubled situation.

There is a big difference between an at-risk gambler and a problem gambler, but the Productivity Commission fails to see that. Those who mention Norway as the best example of where gaming can be conducted in a regulated and accountable framework must be fruit loops. Norway has gaming machines in public toilets, service stations and local corner stores. Is that the sort of unregulated, unchecked environment we want in New South Wales? No! The Government has spent considerable time on putting in place a regulated and accountable framework that delivers for the industry and for the people of New South Wales. I urge the Productivity Commission to look at the reality. I commend the Appropriation Bill to the House. It delivers for the people of New South Wales and, importantly, I am proud of what it does for Bankstown.

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [1.16 p.m.]: To the observer, this was an interestingly crafted budget. However, victims of the Government's years of mismanagement through unemployment or through increased taxes and charges, the non-delivery of infrastructure, poor public transport or poor public health delivery would say that the budget certainly did not deliver. Labor will say that this budget is about jobs, but the Government's figures tell a different story. The figures show that the unemployment rate will grow to about 8.5 per cent over the next two years, and it is likely that the figure will be worse as New South Wales unemployment is already well above the national rate and has been since 2005. However, the budget states that we will be below the national figure this year.

The figures also cast significant doubt over future budget growth estimates, amid claims that the budget will be back in the black in a couple of years. Without Kevin Rudd's infrastructure spending, there would be an underlying budget deficit of more than \$8 billion over the next four years. The budget confirms that New South Wales is in recession, even if the Treasurer cannot utter the R word. The budget shows negative growth for 2009-10 of 0.5 per cent for New South Wales against a backdrop of national growth. The promises on infrastructure cannot be believed, when one considers Labor's track record. It is all about talk and no action. As the budget shows, the Government has not delivered on projects already announced, with an underspend on capital works of some \$188 million.

We agree with the Government that the budget is a true Labor budget. It is all about spinning a message, but unfortunately the reality is a much sadder story for the people of New South Wales. These figures show that the Government does not have its spending under control. That is the reason the budget is in deficit; it is not a result of the global financial crisis. Expenditure growth has ballooned out to 8 per cent just six months after the Premier promised to cut it back by 5 per cent. It is a fantasy to believe that it will now fall back to 2.8 per cent in just two years. The best article recorded post budget was one by the former New South Wales Treasurer. On 17 June 2009 he was quoted in an article by AAP, which stated:

Former NSW treasurer Michael Costa has attacked the budget handed down by his successor, Eric Roozendaal, suggesting it is over-ambitious and saying reforms to the public sector are just a stunt.

As Premier Nathan Rees declared his first State budget a "winner", Mr Costa raised doubts about the state government's ability to rein in expenses.

Tuesday's budget objective to cut government spending by one per cent a year for the next two years, and by 1.5 per cent for the following two years, is a central plan to Mr Roozendaal's plan to return the state to surplus.

"There are some very ambitious figures particularly in terms of controlling expenses," Mr Costa told SKY News.

"The figure I always used to measure my budgets on was the long-term fiscal gap. I failed and I think he's failed as well."

Mr Costa, who was dumped as treasurer last September and quit politics soon after, is also critical of the government's plans to amalgamate 160 state agencies into 13 super-departments.

The government has said the measure is the largest public sector reform in 30 years.

"It is just a stunt," Mr Costa said.

The fact is: the policy areas are still there. You might get rid of a few bureaucrats.

"We've had three or four goes since I was in the government dealing with back office and IT and I don't think the savings are going to be there.

Mr Egan, who is well qualified to make comment, says it all. I note that infrastructure spending is totally in the hands of Kevin Rudd, excluding Federal Government contributions of previously announced projects. The State increase in infrastructure spending in 2009-10 is nil, 2010-11 nil and 2011-12 nil. The budget reveals a \$188 million underspend on current projects. Underfunded superannuation liabilities grow at nearly \$34 billion. Estimates revealed an average \$31 billion over forward estimates and no material increase in contributions to address this increasing problem. The usual review of assumptions has been delayed until later. It has been revealed that the borrowings of the Government per household are estimated to increase by 300 per cent. Every household in New South Wales will have \$36,330 in total State debt and liabilities by 2012 and that figure rises through the forecasts. State debt is rising with no plan to pay it off.

The unemployment rate in New South Wales has been above the national rate since 2005. The current unemployment rate in New South Wales is 6.4 per cent while the national average is 5.7 per cent. It is predicted that the unemployment rate in New South Wales will drop to 5.8. The bottom line is that we are in the red by \$1.3 billion despite original forecasts of a surplus of \$0.3 billion. The underlying deficit in 2009-10 is \$4.3 billion if Kevin Rudd's money is excluded. The total underlying deficit, excluding those funds, is forecast to be \$8 billion, which is a damning exposure of the Government's mismanagement not only for this fiscal year but also for past years in which it has sat on the Treasury bench. Locally there were some reasonable expectations, not great, for the completion of projects that have been long promised for the electorate of Wagga Wagga. Right across regional New South Wales many communities have been promised new hospitals and police stations.

I note that along with the promise of the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital, other hospitals have been promised for Bega, Forbes, Parkes, Dubbo, Tamworth, the Northern Beaches, Lismore and Port Macquarie—the extra pod. Other smaller multipurpose centres are also on the drawing board. None of them has been delivered or delayed due to budget constraints. On Wednesday 17 June the *Daily Advertiser* was headed "No money for planning, No money to Build ZERO, That's what the State Government thinks of the Base Hospital redevelopment and has people wondering: Is anyone listening?" No mention was made of this important redevelopment, for which more than \$4 million has been spent already in the planning process. The article states:

A spokesman for Mr Della Bosca said the minister was unavailable for comment, which left Labor MLC Tony Catanzariti to fly the flag for his party.

"It's disappointing," he said.

"I'd do anything to help the community. It's really hard—it's not like we're talking about a luxury, it's something that is needed. When there are so many things the State Government has to do, somebody is going to miss out and unfortunately, it's us," he said.

They are hardly fighting words of a Labor member of the Legislative Council committed to delivering a desperately needed new Wagga Wagga Base Hospital, which services not only Wagga Wagga but also the entire region of more than 280,000 people. It services Griffith, the hometown of the Hon. Tony Catanzariti, as well as Tumut, Henty, Coolamon and Cootamundra. The Wagga Wagga Base Hospital draws from an enormous catchment. Again the community is disappointed that the Minister did not see fit to make a decision on this project. There are two solutions. One is that the Government fund this project through capital works as a priority. The other is that it engage in a public-private partnership to deliver the infrastructure in a timely manner and on budget, which will enable the health service to deliver efficiently.

Announcements were made about other infrastructure in the region. I acknowledge that \$792,000 was spent on clinical support, \$1.4 million was allocated to the new agricultural research facilities, and an undisclosed sum was allocated for the Riverina Juvenile Justice Centre, which later received \$52 million to build a new centre. The old centre is overcrowded and was in need of refurbishment and/or replacement, but that project has now been put on hold. Currently overcrowding in the juvenile justice centre has been the focus of media attention. The Minister has promised to install extra bedding to accommodate its inmates. That has occurred but the major project has been put on hold.

An amount of \$19 million was allocated for the necessary safety upgrade of Blowering Dam, but it was not what I call capital works that could be suspended or left for a later time. The refurbishment and extension of the Wagga Wagga courthouse, which hosts sittings of the Supreme Court, District Court and Local Court, is a long-promised project that has not been delivered for the people of the region. The courthouse does not have enough courtrooms, it is overcrowded and it is long past the time for refurbishment and implementation of the plan to establish new accommodation at the back of the courthouse. Gocup Road did not receive funding. I have spoken many times about the desperate need for an investment of \$82 million in partnership with the Federal Government, but for the past 18 months Federal and State Ministers and two members of the Legislative Council who represent the area have been unable to bring about an outcome. About two weeks ago, just \$500,000 was provided for remedial works for the road, but with the completion of Visy stage two and the increased load to be carried on that road, more money and a staged solution is needed, that is, an investment of capital works funding each year from the Government. Again we see a lack of commitment to infrastructure.

I will touch on Health again because it is an enormous priority for the region. The former Minister for Health John Della Bosca said, "The Rees Government will invest \$603 million in building better health infrastructure ...". He claimed that it was part of a record investment but he forgot to check the press release of the former Minister for Health, Reba Meagher, who said on 3 June 2008:

... the Iemma Government will continue to deliver better health services and infrastructure with \$839.5 million investment in health capital works ...

That is a difference of \$236 million between the announcements in 2008 and 2009. Of course, none of that materialised to bricks and mortar in the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital, nor in Lismore, Parkes or Dubbo. Many communities have been promised that infrastructure but, sadly, it has been undelivered. Health is the number one priority. If ever there was an issue to unite the Riverina community it is redevelopment of the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. Today's local paper refers to concerns that the regional dialysis service is provided in an antiquated building that is long past its use-by date.

In today's edition of the *Daily Advertiser* Roger Southward complains that the long-promised revamp of the adjacent building to accommodate renal patients has not been completed. It was promised some months ago, but that has not come about. People requiring daily renal services have to travel from Tumut and other places to Wagga Wagga, because of the Government's failure to provide satellite services. That adds to their woes and the difficulties experienced by the renal dialysis service. Yet again there is no commitment in the budget—and no announcement since its introduction—that there will be investment in renal dialysis services for the Tumut community, which has campaigned very hard.

The front page of today's *Daily Advertiser* states that obstetric services are in crisis. They are in crisis because the Wagga Wagga Base Hospital is in desperate need of upgrading so that it can attract the obstetricians and specialists that are needed to provide a service for a base hospital. Because of the Government's failure to deliver on critical infrastructure, the reputation of that hospital is widespread. The staff are terrific, they work in such difficult conditions that no-one could complain of their professionalism, care and the service given by them. The New South Wales Ambulance Service and everyone involved with health services are very highly regarded.

However, without investment in bricks and mortar for that hospital it will be almost impossible for the Minister for Health and bureaucrats to retain or recruit those professionals. The other communities that I mentioned earlier have lost that nucleus, that hub, of specialists who worked in their towns and cities; they have gone elsewhere. In Wagga Wagga people have to rely on locum services or agencies. It was suggested to me yesterday, and again through today's newspaper, that the locum who was permanently stationed in Wagga Wagga has now gone because of contractual mismanagement. NSW Health has negotiated with a company that provides obstetricians on a temporary rotation basis.

I will meet with the Minister for Health in a few days time to raise this issue. I will ask her: What is the problem? Why can the Minister not make a decision as to the direction that project will take? All it needs to fix

this problem is a decision, but the Government cannot bring itself to do that. If the Government crafted a public-private partnership that delivered benefits for everyone, many companies would be willing to negotiate and participate in an agreement with the Government to deliver that infrastructure. But there is no willingness to make a decision. I truly believe that that is the kind of issue that is affecting the ability of bureaucrats to solve this problem.

The Minister for Health needs to take an interest in this matter. I will raise it with her when we meet, because unless this is resolved the hundreds of impending births will result in pregnant women not being able to consult the one obstetrician for the duration of their pregnancy. At the very least, those kinds of services are built on trust, on ensuring that the mother has all the available information. A relationship is formed between the mother and the specialist. I encourage the Minister to take a special interest in this.

None of us needs front-page stories every week or so about the failings of the health service. The Government tends to be the focus of front-page stories through waste, mismanagement and catastrophe. We want solutions to this problem. Announcements were made in the budget, but in the back rooms mismanagement continues. There is much more I could touch on regarding the disappointment that some communities have experienced through the budget. On another day I will raise other issues, such as lack of spending on the sewerage capital works program, the sport and recreation grants, the mismanagement of the community partnership grants that is occurring and the difficulties that members of Parliament are having with that. I am sure there will be lots of opportunities to raise those mismanagement issues in the days and weeks ahead.

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

[The Assistant-Speaker (Mr Grant McBride) left the chair at 1.36 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER: I welcome to the gallery a delegation of visitors from Nagoya, in Japan, headed by Mr Onishi Satoshi, the Deputy Mayor of Nagoya, and Mr Yoshida Ryuichi, Chair of Nagoya City Assembly. Nagoya has a sister city relationship with the City of Sydney and the delegation is visiting Parliament as guests of the member for Sydney, the Lord Mayor. I look forward to meeting them later this afternoon on behalf of the Parliament.

CHILDREN'S COMMISSIONER FOR A DAY COMPETITION

Ministerial Statement

Mr GRAHAM WEST (Campbelltown—Minister for Juvenile Justice, Minister for Volunteering, Minister for Youth, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Veterans' Affairs) [2.18 p.m.]: I announce the appointment of a new Children's Commissioner for New South Wales. Eleven-year-old Meg Thompson has been the Children's Commissioner for half a day now following her winning entry in the "Be the Children's Commissioner for a Day" competition. Mr Speaker, if you do not mind my flouting the standing orders of the House, I hold up her entry for members to see.

Meg has travelled from Millthorpe in central west New South Wales to be here today and has actually given up her school camp to be commissioner for a day. While everyone else is playing, she is working. Not only is she here to take over from Gaye Phillips as the Commissioner for Children and Young People, but also to celebrate Universal Children's Day. Earlier today the member for Bathurst and I met Meg and talked to her about her ideas for the young people of New South Wales. Of greatest concern to Meg is the issue of bullying. Meg and I discussed the different forms of bullying and we talked about ways we can address the problem. In her entry to the "Be the Children's Commissioner for a Day" competition, Meg wrote:

Bullying is a very big problem in Australia's youth. We need to stop it immediately. Lots of these bullying cases are on the internet, but physical bullying and face-to-face bullying are very common as well.

I will help and support anyone who gets bullied, because I know how it feels. So to all the bullies out there, 'Why are you bullying?' It is wrong.

Meg has urged the young people of New South Wales to seek help from their parents, friends, adults and teachers if they are bullied. As a result of her discussions, the Commission for Children and Young People will

be putting a new resource on its web page in response. This competition was designed to promote children and young people's participation in government. The New South Wales Government is committed to delivering for the young people of New South Wales and helping them reach their full potential. We have also recently completed an innovative online youth engagement project whereby young people told us how they wanted the Youth budget spent. We also listen to the New South Wales Youth Advisory Council, which provides important advice about youth issues. On behalf of the House I would like to thank Meg for being today's Children's Commissioner and for giving the young people of New South Wales a voice.

Ms PRU GOWARD (Goulburn) [2.21 p.m.]: On behalf of the Opposition I join with the Government in congratulating Meg Thompson on her appointment. It was very nice to meet her at lunch today. Her generation is media savvy. Her suggestion was that we address bullying, particularly given the frequency of cyber bullying, with a cyber solution: the use of a website. It is commendable that the commissioner has responded so quickly and agreed to do this. The role of the Commissioner for Children and Young People is a very important one and I am sure that Meg's work today will demonstrate to her, as it does to us, the complexities of these issues and the fact that the answers are never simple. What is important is to put the interests of children first.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Notices of Motions

Government Business Notices of Motions (for Bills) given.

QUESTION TIME

[Question time commenced at 2.25 p.m.]

CBD METRO

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question is directed to the Premier. Given that Kevin Rudd chose Sydney to unveil his plan to ensure growth of cities is matched by infrastructure improvements and said, "... in some of our suburbs, especially on the fringe, [public transport services] are simply missing", why does the Premier persist with the useless and unwanted CBD Metro in Rozelle instead of building the much-needed south-west and north-west rail links?

Mr NATHAN REES: I quote:

Sydney is going to grow and it will grow in the way it has grown for a century, which is to continue to expand on its outskirts.

That is the planning policy of the Leader of the Opposition.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr NATHAN REES: The planning policy of the Leader of the Opposition is to let the market rule versus the scorched earth—

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

Mr NATHAN REES: We have the scorched earth approach to urban planning from the Leader of the Opposition versus a metropolitan strategy, now five years old and ready for review and updating, being prepared—

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

Mr NATHAN REES: The Leader of the Opposition would have an iota of credibility on this issue if he had ever produced a planning document at any time in his life. He simply has not done that. He has a scorched earth approach to planning policy and urban planning. I guarantee that projects that delivered

60,000 jobs in New South Wales would all have hit the sand if he ever were near the Treasury benches. Earlier today the Lord Mayor of Parramatta City Council, Paul Garrard—Parramatta City Council has a new and very good Lord Mayor—rejected calls from fellow mayors. He said:

The CBD Metro is a key component—

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: The article I have in my possession states:

Councillor Paul Garrard has backed the State Government in its plans for the proposed Sydney Metro, as the \$5.3 billion project was the first stage in the Metro rail development that would begin Metro Line 1 from Parramatta to Sydney. The CBD Metro is a key component in the development of a broader, more effective rail network.

Paul Garrard gets it, but the Leader of the Opposition does not. He does not have an urban planning policy and he does not have a plan to encourage investment in New South Wales, in either the commercial sector or the retail sector. The Leader of the Opposition has said:

Sydney is going to grow and it will grow in the way it has grown for a century, which is to continue to expand on its outskirts.

With every home developed on a greenfields site on the outskirts of Sydney there is an additional \$20,000 for the taxpayers of New South Wales to service that home—for roads, schools, hospitals and infrastructure.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of the Opposition will cease interjecting.

Mr NATHAN REES: In simple terms, if we implemented the plans of the Leader of the Opposition, over the next quarter of a century it would cost the people of New South Wales an additional \$12 billion in infrastructure. The Leader of the Opposition has no plan. This Government has achieved an appropriate balance for development on greenfields sites. In contrast, the Leader of the Opposition has a scorched earth policy with regard to urban planning, and no planning at all other than to stop 400 projects that have delivered 60,000 jobs.

CHILD SAFETY

Ms CHERIE BURTON: My question is directed to the Premier. Can the Premier update the House on what the Government is doing to help keep children safe?

Mr NATHAN REES: I acknowledge the longstanding interest of the member for Kogarah in this matter. At the outset I congratulate Meg Thompson on her day as Children's Commissioner. Between 1999 and 2008 more than 470 children have fallen from windows or balconies more than one metre high. Tragically, some of those falls have resulted in death. Ten days ago three-year-old Iman Mostafa tragically fell to his death in Kogarah. Our hearts go out to his parents and also to the Afaz family in whose apartment the tragedy occurred. Five days later six-year-old Ayden del Pozo was lucky to survive after a similar incident in Como, in Sydney's south. These incidents are a wake-up call for all of us in New South Wales—to policymakers, to landlords, to the building industry and also, obviously, to mothers, fathers and carers.

I will come to this Government's specific measures in a moment, but the clear message from these tragic cases is that every house where children live or habitually stay must be childproofed so far as it is possible. The familiar list includes to supervise children at all times when they are having a bath; not leave pot handles hanging over the edge of the stove; switch off the iron when you finish using it and make sure it is left somewhere to cool down; cover-up power points; lock away chemicals and medicines as well as knives, tools and other sharp objects; get rid of dangerous dogs once you have a baby or at least keep them caged; fence pools and keep the fencing well maintained; and, from the latest lesson, assess windows for safety.

With the hot weather approaching, mums and dads might be tempted to leave windows open while children are playing inside or at night. Fly screens are not designed to stop children from falling through a window. That is why I can advise the House that the Government will undertake an education campaign to help prevent further tragedies. The campaign will consist of four main elements: a print and radio advertising campaign, including in community languages; updating the Blue Book, which is provided to all parents of newborns; providing brochures and posters to family service providers such as childcare centres, preschools, child health clinics and community service centres, and working with the task force headed by Professor Danny Cass, who is the head of trauma at the Westmead Children's Hospital. I joined Professor Cass this morning for this announcement to examine other ways to prevent falls.

Overseas evidence, particularly from the United States, has shown a dramatic improvement in safety after public awareness campaigns and other support initiatives have been undertaken with up to a 95 per cent reduction in falls. We expect this campaign to make a significant difference. Some of the answers are all too simple: installing window locks or guards that allow a window to open only 10 centimetres; keeping away from windows furniture or anything a child can climb on, especially beds; and ultimately, of course, maintaining vigilance and supervision. I remind members that all new public housing is required to have high windows in bedrooms and to provide window locks to avoid the precise situation that occurred last week.

Beyond our education campaign, the Cass Taskforce will look at other ways to address children's falls. This will include a symposium next month involving relevant sectors such as local government, planning, health and hardware retailers. I understand also that the Australian Building Trade Board is working with Monash University on the issue of children falling from windows. We look forward to hearing from the task force. Meanwhile, the community education campaign will get underway immediately. Once again, I urge every parent and carer to check their windows and assess the risk, especially in flats and apartments. You may just save your child's life.

COUNTRY HEALTH SERVICES

Mr ANDREW STONER: I direct my question to the Premier. A woman who attended the accident scene that cost the lives of a Condobolin couple was forced to take the orphaned baby to Tullamore herself and then personally borrow a child seat for the ambulance because the hospital did not have one for the trip to Dubbo. Given these circumstances, will the Premier admit that his cuts to country health are not just depriving country people of essential services but depriving them of basic human dignity?

Mr NATHAN REES: I am happy to get the details of the incident to which the member refers, but I will say this: Funding for every area health service is at a record high.

HEALTH INITIATIVES

Ms SONIA HORNERY: I address my question to the Minister for Health. Can the Minister update the House on the Government's investment in healthier communities?

Ms CARMEL TEBBUTT: I thank the member for Wallsend for her question and for her keen interest in this matter. As members of the House would be aware, obesity is a major issue not just in New South Wales but also in many developing countries. It is an issue receiving a lot of attention. Recent studies indicate that 67 per cent of Australian men and 52 per cent of Australian women aged 25 years and over are overweight or obese. These statistics not only present a cosmetic concern but also represent a serious health issue. Increasing obesity rates can contribute to a range of preventable conditions such as Type 2 diabetes and heart disease, to name two. Across Australia, 235 people a day develop Type 2 diabetes, of whom half are not aware they have the condition. Currently, 7.9 per cent of men and 6.8 per cent of women reported having diabetes or high blood glucose—a marked increase on the 1997 figures of 4.7 per cent of men and 4 per cent of women.

Despite our increasing awareness that obesity can contribute to these preventable conditions, we are not seeing a dramatic improvement in turning this issue around. Yesterday another report was released showing that the prevalence of Type 2 diabetes in Australia will nearly double over the next 40 years. A further complication is that many Australians with the disease do not manage their condition properly. Reducing the rate of obesity will have an impact on the growth in the number of people with Type 2 diabetes. We have a number of programs aimed at preventing obesity, particularly in children. The increase in obese and overweight children is of particular concern; I know it would concern every member of this House. Prevention is better than cure; however, given the number of overweight and/or obese children and adults in New South Wales, we also need to provide services that support changes in lifestyle behaviour.

The New South Wales Government leads in this regard. We have an innovative program that is proving promising. The New South Wales Get Healthy Information and Coaching Service is the first of its kind in Australia. We are investing some \$3 million over two years in this program. The most recent promising data shows that the New South Wales Get Healthy Information and Coaching Service has received calls from over 4,500 adults, of which more than 1,600 have enrolled in the coaching aspect of the service. The service is based on international evidence that suggests individuals can be supported to modify their lifestyle through over-the-phone coaching with the support of trained health professionals. Until recently, the provision of ongoing telephone coaching to improve an individual's health has been available only to select kinds of health

insurance companies—that is, for those who can afford to pay. However, this publicly funded innovative service now offered by the New South Wales Government is available to every adult irrespective of their means or where they live.

The service operates between the hours of 8.00 a.m. and 8.00 p.m. Monday to Friday. Adults can contact the service for one-off advice or, alternatively, they can enrol in a coaching program of about six months. The only expense to the participant is the cost of that first telephone call, which is priced at the cost of a local call from a fixed landline. Trained health professionals support Get Healthy clients to change important lifestyle behaviours related to diet, exercise and weight. We all know how difficult it can be to make these changes; often people will struggle to sustain these changes in their day-to-day lives. This type of service is so important because it can support people to make the right changes and help them maintain those changes. The Get Healthy Service is being independently evaluated by the University of Sydney with preliminary evaluation results expected by mid-2010. Clients will be followed up beyond that to determine the effectiveness of the service in the longer term. However, I am delighted with the results of the service to date.

Thousands of adults in New South Wales are benefiting from the service. It is not only helping to make healthy gains for individuals enrolled in the coaching program, but also providing a statewide benefit for the health system by preventing illness. Overweight and obesity costs the health system billions of dollars. This \$3 million investment by the Rees Government is an outstanding investment in improving the health of the population and preventing illness.

ST GABRIEL'S SCHOOL FOR HEARING IMPAIRED CHILDREN

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: My question is directed to the Premier. Why did the Premier infer through the media that he would fund the St Gabriel's School language development program for young children found to be deaf through the newborn hearing screening scheme and then lambast mothers who turned up expecting to hear the good news personally, telling them instead, "You are on your own"?

Mr NATHAN REES: Once again, Jillian, you are wrong. What I did was attend the Day of Difference Benefit Ball some months ago. I agreed to a request to attend a fundraiser for St Gabriel's School for Hearing Impaired Children in Castle Hill, which is run independently of government. The school board made a decision to discontinue funding for a service that currently is partly funded by the New South Wales Government. I met with some of the mums after that function on Thursday or Friday of last week. However, I also said that if they wanted to come to me with a proposal for one-off funding in conjunction with other partners to keep it going for a month or a year until they could devise a sustainable funding strategy, I am happy to have that discussion. That is as far as my comment went. The Deputy Leader of the Opposition knows it is not the case that the New South Wales Government, or, for that matter, other governments throughout Australia, can step into the breach.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Why did you tell the media you were funding it?

Mr NATHAN REES: I simply did not say that.

Mrs Jillian Skinner: You told Channel Seven.

Mr NATHAN REES: The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is wrong. You are wrong. Withdraw!

The SPEAKER: Order! Members on both sides of the Chamber will come to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: I was very clear in my comments. From memory, in the last financial year there was a \$35,000 contribution from the New South Wales Government to the service. What I have said to the mums is that that commitment remains rock solid. However, we cannot simply step into the breach in the event that an independent organisation, which has historically funded the service, has withdrawn funding. I have said that I am prepared to continue the level of funding I have indicated. I have also said that if there is a reasonable proposal for a shared approach to one-off funding for the organisation to establish a sustainable funding model, I am happy to have that discussion. I also make the point that we made sure that appropriate arrangements were put in place with the Royal Deaf and Blind School nearby for those students. I believe that our approach to this matter passes the reasonable person test.

YEAR 10 STUDENT OPTIONS FOR CONTINUING EDUCATION

Mr ALLAN SHEARAN: I address my question to the Minister for Education and Training. Will she update the House on options for year 10 students to help them to stay at school?

Ms VERITY FIRTH: I thank the member for Londonderry for his question. Under significant changes to the Education Act, from January next year all students will be required to stay at school until the end of year 10 and after that they must continue in education, training or paid work until they reach the age of 17. This major step forward is aimed at maximising opportunities for our young people and building our State's prosperity. The reforms have been designed to lift student engagement by providing a wider range of choices after they have completed year 10.

Today I am very excited to announce further changes that will give students wider vocational choices and improve their chances of employment. We know, and research shows, that students who stay longer at school and engaged in further education and training statistically are more likely to receive higher wages, experience less unemployment and are more likely to do further study. For the majority of students the school setting is the best place for them to complete their School Certificate, but for some students TAFE is a better learning environment.

From next year, students planning to undertake a year 10 equivalent course at TAFE will have access to up to 150 industry-based courses. TAFE institutes across New South Wales will decide which courses are available based on the needs of students and employment opportunities in their region. Students in Dubbo, for example, are likely to have a different focus from students in the city, which is why options will be offered on a case-by-case, region-by-region basis. Importantly, for the first time they will be offered as Certificate II courses, which will give students entry-level qualifications and a head start in their career. That means they will be equipped with the right skills and better qualifications which will be recognised by employers in areas such as agriculture, mechanics and construction.

For those students who are clear about their vocational path, the Government is doing everything it can to keep them motivated and help them to achieve a brighter future. Students definitely do not need the misinformation that we see both the Greens and the Opposition spreading irresponsibly in another one of their bizarre alliances.

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

Ms VERITY FIRTH: Recently, in what could only be described as a media misinformation spree, the Greens and the Opposition teamed up and spread misinformation across New South Wales incorrectly claiming in local papers, on regional radio and in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that TAFE was closing its doors to students who want to complete their School Certificate. Each year a few thousand school age students sit the School Certificate at TAFE rather than at school, and that will continue to be the case. Let me be clear: There has been no change to that approach. The member for Murrumbidgee should have checked his facts before he embarked on a spree of misinformation and hysterical claims.

At the end of the day his claims do not necessarily harm the Government or other people who know the truth, but they hurt year 10 students who want to know their options and who, for political reasons, are being fed misinformation that tells them they will not have access to TAFE. It is absolutely outrageous, especially at this time of the education year when year 10 students are considering their options for next year. The member for Murrumbidgee told the *Sydney Morning Herald*:

If these kids can't be given an alternative to school then they are going to end up on the street.

The Government might save a dollar in one hand but it is going to cost \$4 in the other because agencies like juvenile justice, DOCS and the police will be picking them up

This is not only insulting but also just plain wrong. The Government has provided \$98 million a year to accommodate the extra students who will go to TAFE or remain at schools as part of the raising of the school leaving age. I emphasise that the Government has provided \$98 million for extra support for our schools and for TAFE. Meanwhile the Greens, who are on a planet even farther away from earth than the one the Opposition is on, accused the Government of locking out students from TAFE and trapping students in schools. Obviously their claims are completely ridiculous. That was a cheap shot at the expense of students, who became unnecessarily worried. I give my absolute assurance that year 10 students will be able to sit for their School Certificate at TAFE and participate in a wider range of Certificate II vocational options than previously they ever had. They will be able to engage in their education and achieve an even brighter future than would otherwise be the case, which is what those students deserve.

For most students, school is and will remain the most appropriate place to complete year 10. TAFE is an adult learning environment and is not necessarily appropriate for everyone. Since this incident, I have had the

opportunity of talking to the member for Murrumbidgee. I think we have reached an understanding about exactly what we are doing. It has always been important to determine whether TAFE is a better option than school for an individual student, and that will continue to be the case. Students wishing to study at TAFE instead of school will need the agreement of their parents and the TAFE director to provide assurance that it is in their best interests to continue their education in a different environment. That is tremendously important. And while the Opposition and their new best friends, the Greens, get it wrong again, our innovative policy has been adopted by every other State and Territory as the national standard.

GREATER WESTERN AREA HEALTH SERVICE

Mr ANDREW STONER: I direct my question to the Premier. Will he live up to what he said last October, "The days of ... acting like some kind of secret society have ended", and now release the uncensored version of the document I am holding?

Mr David Campbell: It is your speech.

Mr ANDREW STONER: It is not.

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will come to order. I call the Minister for Planning to order.

Mr ANDREW STONER: Will the Premier live up to the words he said last October, "The days of ... acting like some kind of secret society have ended", and now release the uncensored version of the document I am holding—which refers to cuts to the Greater Western Area Health Service and which has had entire pages removed, including the title and contents page—so that the public will know what to expect next?

Mr NATHAN REES: The Leader of The Nationals did not make it clear in his question, but I assume he is referring to the document he waved around with abandon yesterday.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Release the uncensored version.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the Leader of The Nationals to order. He has asked his question and he will allow the Premier to answer it.

Mr NATHAN REES: The document that the Leader of The Nationals has just waved about is not a document produced by or for the Government. I am advised it has no status within the Greater Western Area Health Service and it has not been acted on. I want to make it perfectly clear: Is the Leader of The Nationals purporting to wave a document today that was released under freedom of information legislation and that the Opposition referred to yesterday?

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Can we see the document?

Mr NATHAN REES: Is it the same one, or not?

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Can we see the document?

Mr NATHAN REES: Is it the same document, or something else?

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will come to order. They will not conduct a debate across the Chamber. The Leader of The Nationals has asked his question and the Premier is responding.

Mr NATHAN REES: It remains unclear to me whether the document that has been waved around today is the same document that the Leader of The Nationals waved around yesterday. In that context, I make the point that the document waved around by the Leader of The Nationals yesterday, if it is the same as the one he is waving around today, has no status in the Government and has no status in the Greater Western Area Health Service. It has not been acted on. We continue to make significant investments.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: There is a \$42 million increase in the budget for Greater Western Area Health Service. That means a substantial increase in services for the people in the Greater Western area. Yesterday I pointed to the need for the Australian health system to undergo fundamental reform. Why? Because demand is growing in the order of 8 per cent each year and our Medicare levy pays in the order of 10 per cent for that health system. Unless we engage in fundamental reform, the sorts of challenges faced by our health system, and indeed the health systems throughout Australia, will continue to get more serious.

We have already said publicly that we want to engage in reform with the Commonwealth Government. We want to ensure that the patient is at the centre of health care across Australia. In response to that, the Opposition has said nothing about health policy in New South Wales. We know that our system has its stresses, as does every health system in Australia. We also know that we have matched that with record funding and a record number of nurses and procedures in place every day in our hospitals to service the people of New South Wales that are unrivalled anywhere in the world. If members opposite have a serious concern, I am more than happy to have a discussion with them. However, I will not allow the good work that goes on in our system—a system that by world standards is absolutely first class—to be undermined by the sort of nonsense that members opposite parade around this Parliament every second day.

TOURISM

Mr TONY STEWART: I address my question to the Minister for Tourism. Will the Minister update the House on what the New South Wales Government is doing to promote New South Wales tourism during the coming summer?

Ms JODI McKAY: I note the smile on the Leader of the Opposition's face; he always looks forward to this in every session. I thank the honourable member for Bankstown for his ongoing support of and interest in the tourism industry. October has already been a huge month for events in New South Wales. We had the biggest start to the month in living memory, with up to 700,000 fans and visitors attending seven major events in the first week of October, including the Socceroos versus the Netherlands match, the Black Eyed Peas, the Epsom race day and the NRL Grand Final. I have spoken previously in the House about Crave, which is a month-long celebration of food, outdoor living and Sydney's unmatched lifestyle. Crave wraps up on Saturday, after 31 days. This month we also hosted the best ever World Masters Games. Some 28,000 athletes from 95 countries competed in 28 sports across 72 venues in Sydney. Last Sunday we also had Breakfast on the Bridge.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind members that we are still in question time. If members want to conduct meetings, they should do so outside the Chamber.

Ms JODI McKAY: Last Sunday the Sydney Harbour Bridge was transformed into the world's most popular picnic spot and up to 6,000 lucky picnic-goers participated in Breakfast on the Bridge. As we heard from the Premier yesterday, images were beamed across the globe, including the United States, the United Kingdom and Nepal. Indeed, it even made the front page in Saudi Arabia. Once again it showed that Sydney is the world's premier event destination. Media personality Johanna Griggs, who was one of the thousands of picnic-goers enjoying the breakfast, said:

I think it celebrates Sydneysiders and it celebrates what a great place that we live in ... this has just floored everybody. I think it's really nice to give something back to Sydneysiders.

Although the member for Upper Hunter was worried about dirt and rubbish, we were able to prove that we could manage dirt and rubbish. The member's Federal colleague, the member for Macarthur, Pat Farmer, also joined the mud-slinging chorus. He said:

I think these guys are absolutely brain-dead ... I can't believe they're going to shut down the Harbour Bridge, throw some turf over it, to have a picnic ... honestly, these guys have just got it so wrong ...

Who got it so wrong? The Federal member for Macarthur, Pat Farmer, got it wrong. He said:

I can't believe the ridiculous ideas that they come up with.

Look at who got it so wrong! The Government is doing everything it can to demonstrate that Sydney is an energetic, vibrant city and the premier travel destination. We are set for yet another fantastic array of events with a super week of summer sports in Sydney during the first week of December. Let me tell the House about superweek.

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

Ms JODI McKAY: Sydney will host the biggest fight ever held in Australia, with Danny Green and the legendary Roy Jones Junior set to battle it out for the International Boxing Organisation World Cruiserweight Title at Acer Arena on 2 December. This battle of boxing champions will kick off a bumper week of events, including Greg Norman at the Australian Open, the V8 Supercars at Homebush and performances by Cold Chisel, Fleetwood Mac, Green Day, The Living End and Sneaky Sound System, and the Homebake music festival. I can sense the excitement in the House.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will contain themselves.

Ms JODI McKAY: These events are an opportunity for sports fans to come together and enjoy the adventure that is superweek here in Sydney. Up to 30,000 overseas and interstate visitors are expected to visit Sydney during superweek, and that will inject some \$35 million into the New South Wales economy. It will build on our Boys Own Adventure campaign, which is an innovative tourism campaign that we launched earlier this year. That campaign will highlight the five-day superweek of non-stop sports action, which will be held between 2 and 6 December and attract some 320,000 spectators.

As part of the superweek campaign, print advertisements will be running in Melbourne's biggest daily newspaper, the *Herald Sun*, next week, which is Melbourne Cup week. We are not only targeting men as part of this campaign. I am sure that thousands of women across Australia will be tempted by a summer holiday in Sydney and New South Wales. Women are certainly welcome as well. This campaign will target Victoria, South Australia, Queensland and Western Australia to attract interstate visitors to Sydney. There will also be special deals with Tiger Airways.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for South Coast will contain herself.

Ms JODI McKAY: The South Coast is important for our tourism industry. It does not end there. Summer in Sydney will be a mammoth season of events with the December superweek leading into the world's best New Year's Eve celebrations. Of course, we also have the Vivacity festival in January.

TAMWORTH FLIGHT TRAINING

Mr PETER DRAPER: My question is directed to the Premier. Given the importance of the BAE Systems flight training facilities to the Tamworth economy, and considering that there are rival bids from Victoria and Wagga Wagga, will the Premier advise the House whether the New South Wales Government will support BAE's efforts to retain its operations in Tamworth?

Mr NATHAN REES: Yes, we will. We have already charged the relevant State department with assisting BAE in its bid. As I understand it, the current contract runs out in 2011, and the next contract will run until 2017. We will actively support BAE in its bid for that project. Some 90 jobs in Tamworth are supported in that pilot training scheme. Earlier this year we appointed John Blackburn, AO, a former defence department official, to head up our quest to get 30 per cent of Australia's in-country defence spend over the next decade. That will mean investment in the order of \$3.9 billion in New South Wales. John Blackburn will work with BAE to make sure that it is in the best possible position to continue the provision of that contracted work.

AUTOMATIC TELLER MACHINE CRIME

Mr MATTHEW MORRIS: My question is addressed to the Minister for Police. Will the Minister update the House on police resources allocated to automatic teller machine crime in Sydney suburbs?

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting, including the member for South Coast.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: I note that the issue of automatic teller machine [ATM] crime generally relates not only to the theft of cash but also to the wider issue of fraud and occasionally to incidents of identity theft.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease continually interjecting.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: As members will no doubt recall, a couple of years ago we saw a rash of ATM attacks involving ram raids using motor vehicles. Invariably stolen cars were used, sometimes taken in

violent circumstances such as in car-jacking incidents. More recently, criminals have adopted a new method of stealing money from ATMs. Thieves, crooks and organised crime are innovative and, as good as the police are at adopting more proactive and intelligence-based policing methods and developing new ways to target crime, they try to stay one step ahead of the police. The new method of stealing from ATMs is another example. It involves pumping explosive gas into an ATM, igniting it and blowing the machine open. This sometimes allows the thieves to access the cash inside the ATM, but not always. When the explosion is ineffective, the crooks merely end up causing thousands of dollars worth of damage to the building where the ATM is housed and to surrounding buildings.

These incidents have occurred at a number of ATMs across the Sydney greater metropolitan area, and I advise the House that there have been similar attacks interstate and overseas. Police advise me that these attacks are not being committed by any one particular group or gang of offenders or in any particular geographical area. The tactic of blowing open ATMs using explosive gas—so-called bam raids—is extremely unsettling, given the damage caused to surrounding buildings and the even more dire threat that the blast poses to passers-by or persons inside the bank, such as late-night cleaners. I assure the House that the Government and the police are treating these sorts of threats extremely seriously. That is why on 18 November 2008 Commissioner Scipione established Strike Force Piccadilly 2 to investigate these incidents. Strike Force Piccadilly 2 comprises detectives from the NSW Police Force Property Crime Squad, a number of whom took part in the successful Piccadilly 1 investigation.

Mr David Campbell: Great job!

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: As the former Minister for Police, now Minister for Transport, rightly interjects, they did a great job. Piccadilly 1 targeted criminals committing ram-raid attacks on ATMs and resulted in a significant reduction in the number of ram raids. I am pleased to advise the House that officers of the second Piccadilly strike force are building upon the success of the first. Earlier this year police arrested two men at gunpoint outside a bank in the early hours of the morning and seized gas cylinders and what was believed to be a stolen BMW vehicle. In mid August officers from Strike Force Piccadilly 2, assisted by about 80 officers from the State Crime Command, metropolitan regions, the Public Order and Riot Squad, Rescue Squad and the Special Services Group, executed 10 simultaneous search warrants and arrested six men. The arrests related to 13 separate attacks against ATMs that occurred at locations such as Lane Cover, Erina, St Ives, Neutral Bay and Umina. This is a significant achievement, expertly accomplished by New South Wales police.

The Government and the police will continue to commit significant resources to the investigation of these incidents. The Government will continue to provide police with the necessary resources to put these crooks out of business. Valuable resources, as we all appreciate, should be allocated to fighting serious crime, not wasted on Liberal Party factional infighting. But that is exactly what happened recently, as reported in the *Australian* on 2 October.

[*Interruption*]

I will come to Mr Hawkesbury in a minute. Recently police were called to a disturbance at an electoral office of a member of Parliament. They responded in numbers, and included, according to media reports, members of a specialised Rapid Response Unit. When the police arrived they found no unlawful activity, just an outbreak of Liberal Party factionalism.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members from both sides of the House will come to order.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: A meeting of the Young Liberals was being held in the electoral office of the Federal member for Mitchell, Alex Hawke, in Castle Hill.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: My point of order relates to Standing Order 129, relevance. The question was about break-ins to ATMs. Also, it is a standing procedure in this place that if a Minister wishes to attack a member of Parliament, including a Commonwealth member, he should do so by way of substantive motion.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will hear further from the Minister. However, I remind him of the question before the House.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: To be fair, the police discovered an unprecedented and never before seen situation: Alex Hawke had lost control of numbers at his own branch meeting.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 129, relevance. Mr Speaker, you have talked about the standards of the Parliament. If you want to uphold them and if the Minister wants to have a debate—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will not debate the point of order. I remind the Minister of the question before the House.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: That is right, there were more tweed jackets and pinstripe cardigans against him than for him.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: If the Minister wants to move a substantive motion I am sure that Opposition members will be happy to debate the activities of the member for Fairfield and others.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. I again remind the Minister of the question before the House.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: It was just another comical incident involving Liberal Party factional brawling, but one with a serious undertone because the police were called and valuable police resources wasted—

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: You could set up a local area command in Parliament to deal with the issues—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. I am confident the Minister was about to answer the question. Government members will cease interjecting.

Mr MICHAEL DALEY: I note that yesterday the member for Murrumbidgee called for increased police resources in his electorate. Maybe he also has some preselection problems coming up. It all sounds quite funny. The allocation of police resources is a serious task and it can have implications for the safety of the whole community. Police resources should not be diverted to media stunts and standover tactics and police should not have to intervene in the ongoing factional warfare regarding the numbers of the Leader of the Opposition and those of members of the religious Right.

Question time concluded at 3.10 p.m.

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORT

The Clerk announced the receipt, pursuant to section 63C of the Public Finance and Audit Act 1983, of the Auditor-General's Report for 2009, Volume Three, dated October 2009.

STANDING COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (CLIMATE CHANGE)

Chair

The SPEAKER: I inform the House that, pursuant to Standing Order 282 (2), Ms Noreen Hay was this day elected Chair of the Standing Committee on Natural Resource Management (Climate Change). I note the bipartisan support.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: I wish to correct the record: She does not have bipartisan support.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Wollongong was elected Chair without opposition.

PETITIONS

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

Tumut Hospital and Batlow Multiple Purpose Service

Petition asking that vital equipment be provided immediately to both Tumut Hospital and Batlow Multiple Purpose Service, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Tumut Hospital Anaesthetic Services

Petition asking that anaesthetic services at Tumut Hospital be made available immediately, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Bus Service 311

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

Pymont Metro Station

Petition opposing the Metro proposal for a Pymont station at Union Square and requesting community consultation for a suitable site, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Pet Shops

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

Game and Feral Animal Control Amendment Bill 2009

Petitions opposing the Game and Feral Animal Control Amendment Bill 2009 in its entirety, received from **Ms Clover Moore** and **Mr Greg Piper**.

Berowra Police Station

Petition opposing the closure of Berowra Police Station and requesting an increase in the number of officers to man the station, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Drink Container Deposit Levy

Petition requesting a container deposit levy be introduced to reduce litter and increase recycling rates of drink containers, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

National Parks Tourism Developments

Petition opposing the construction of tourism developments in national parks, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Epping Public Housing Roofs

Petition requesting that pitched tile roofs be used in the proposed multiple dwelling houses in Killaloe Avenue, Pennant Hills, received from **Mr Greg Smith**.

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

Wagga Wagga Base Hospital

Petition requesting funding for and the commencement of construction of a new Wagga Wagga Base Hospital in this parliamentary term, received from **Mr Daryl Maguire**.

Northbridge Suspension Bridge

Petition requesting that the Suspension Bridge be protected in accordance with the Heritage Act 1977, received from **Ms Gladys Berejiklian**.

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

The Hon. David Campbell—Pymont Metro Station—lodged 23 September 2009

The Hon. David Campbell—Camerons Corner Upgrade—lodged 23 September 2009

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE**Reordering of General Business**

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [3.11 p.m.]: I move:

That the General Business Order of the Day (for Bills) No. 3 [Crimes Legislation Amendment (Possession of Knives in Public) Bill 2009] have precedence on Thursday 29 October 2009.

The object of the Crimes Legislation Amendment (Possession of Knives in Public) Bill 2009 is to deter the possession of knives in public places and in schools by increasing the maximum penalty for certain offences under the Summary Offences Act 1988 and the Law Enforcement (Powers and Responsibilities) Act 2002 relating to the possession of knives and other dangerous implements in public places and schools. I believe this bill should take priority because the people of New South Wales are sick and tired of what many consider to be a knifing epidemic. They are demanding action to drive down rates of knife possession, and to strengthen police powers in dealing with the problem.

People have every right to be concerned. In 2007 there were some 1,300 stabbings in Sydney, while for the whole of New South Wales the figure was just over 2,300. Over a three-year period, 34 people have been murdered with knives in this State. I wonder how many of those people would be alive today if tougher laws had been in place to deal with people who have no regard for law and order. In my local area there were 37 legal actions for custody of a knife in a public place—one a school—between October 2008 and September 2009. Across the Oxley Local Area Command 723 people were searched for knives during the same period. Let us face it: The existing penalties in New South Wales are not tough enough to be a real deterrent.

People with little respect for the law or for their fellow citizens do not regard a \$550 fine for a first offence as anything more than a slap across the wrist. Despite schedule 1 to the Weapons Prohibition Act 1998 listing flick knives, ballistic knives, sheath knives, Urban Skinner push daggers, trench knives, butterfly knives and star knives as prohibited, the penalties are so weak that many people are prepared to risk carrying them. These weapons are extremely dangerous and there is no place for them on our streets. But nor is there a place for concealed kitchen knives that can kill or maim just as easily.

It appears that knives have become the weapon of choice for many unsavoury elements within our community. Knives become even more dangerous when large quantities of alcohol have been consumed, or when in the hands of gangs. Unfortunately, many people now think that when an argument starts the answer is to pull a knife, while possession of knives inflames many disagreements. A segment on *60 Minutes* in June summed up the situation very well. The story said:

It could be your street, your child, it can happen anywhere. Out of the blue, a vicious attack with tragic consequences. Every night, gangs of teenagers are out looking for trouble, just itching for a fight. And these days, they're not fighting with their fists. Knives are the weapons of choice. They're easy to get, easy to hide and can do a hell of a lot of damage. And the law of this suburban jungle now seems to be, stab first or be stabbed. With hospitals reporting a 50 per cent increase in stabbings over the last three years, no wonder parents are nervous, and demanding action.

People are demanding greater deterrents to stop individuals from carrying knives. They have witnessed what is happening around the world, and they know that without strong action our knife epidemic will only get worse. They fear the situation will deteriorate to the point where we end up like the United States of America or Britain, where at least one young person per week is killed with a knife. The unfortunate stabbing murder of a 17-year-old on a Sydney train earlier this year saw a 16-year-old end up before the courts. Both the death and the fact that someone so young was charged are a tragedy. But it was the highly emotional plea by the dead boy's father that reinforced the need to increase penalties and to punish anyone, of any age, who carries a knife.

The tragedy has already occurred when a killer is jailed. We need to provide deterrents that will stop the murders, but to do that we must make people who are tempted to carry an illegal knife in public realise that they can go to jail—even for a first offence. I congratulate Reverend the Hon. Fred Nile in the other place on introducing this bill, and I also congratulate the Government and the Opposition on their bipartisan support for this important legislation. The Crimes Legislation Amendment (Possession of Knives in Public) Bill 2009 proposes to toughen penalties so that even a first-time offender could face a prison sentence, sending a very clear deterrent message that knife possession will not be tolerated in New South Wales. That is why this bill deserves priority tomorrow.

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

Motion agreed to.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Reordering of General Business

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [3.16 p.m.]: I move:

That the General Business Notice of Motion (General Notice) given by me this day [Macarthur Station Commuter Car Park] have precedence on Thursday 29 October 2009.

This is an important issue, because the Macarthur car park is an example of the Labor Government's greed and incompetence at its very worst. I thank all the local residents and community representatives who have contacted the New South Wales Coalition about this matter to outline their justifiable concerns. It is why I am raising those concerns today. It is regrettable that their local members have failed to do so. I have listened to what residents are saying and I believe they have a very strong case. My motion needs to be debated tomorrow because time is of the essence. The consultation period for resident input closed yesterday and the Government now needs to consider its position.

Hundreds of commuters who use the current car park, which is located at Bolger Street in close proximity to Macarthur railway station, could be forced out within a year. The land on which the car park is situated was sold by a State Government agency for \$12 million to DHI Investments, which intends to build or expand Macarthur Tavern on the site. The Government's alternative location for a car park defies common sense. The new car park will be 500 metres from Macarthur station, which is a considerable walk. I have been advised by people who have tried to walk the distance that there is an extremely dangerous intersection to cross, with no plans for pedestrian safety. There are concerns about the state of the footpath, which will be difficult for older residents in particular to negotiate. There are concerns also for people with a disability who want to utilise the car park.

It makes no sense that the existing facility, which is only a few metres from the railway station, should be moved half a kilometre away because the State Government would rather sell the land to a developer than ensure that commuters have a safe place to park their cars. Local residents have written to the Coalition and conveyed their message very ably. One wrote:

Now we recognise the need for commuter car parking for this growing region—indeed we were among the many voices requesting such for many years. However, nobody in all of Campbelltown as far south as Wollondilly had envisaged a government would close down and restrict presently utilised car parks adjoining the Macarthur train station, turn the car park land over to commercial developers for \$12 million (a pub next to the station!) and construct a brand new one [a car park] by levelling a forested residential nature reserve, right next to young families and elderly retiree homes, almost half a kilometre from the train station. This is not at all what anybody asked for.

The traffic plan for the new facility can only be characterised as one that transforms a quiet newly-developed and beautiful estate into a main thoroughfare for commuters as far out as Appin and Menangle. Access for disabled drivers and passengers at the car park will be at 486m away from the train station.

It is an important issue. The number of emails and letters we have received from concerned residents in the south-west of Sydney has been overwhelming. That is why we are raising this issue in the House today in the hope that all members will have the opportunity to debate it tomorrow, particularly the members of Parliament representing these residents, who regrettably have not stood up to advocate their issues. We would also like the Government to consider some options that the residents themselves have put forward. The first is to use the current car park site—

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

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN: It is an important issue and the member for The Entrance will have an opportunity to debate it tomorrow if he supports the motion. I turn now to the residents' preferred options. The first is to use the current car park site to build a multilevel car park; and, secondly, to use the vacant land on the University of Western Sydney, Campbelltown side of the station to build a new commuter car park as it would not impact residents and would be closer to the station. Another proposal put forward by residents is for the State Government to engage Macarthur Square in a possible contract to allow commuter car parking at the site.

Not only have the residents done the right thing in raising their concerns about this proposal, which lacks any common sense, but also they have put forward some alternatives. It is about time this House recognised those needs and allowed this issue to be debated tomorrow so that all the residents' concerns can be aired. This is an issue that goes not just to the heart of the Macarthur region but is important generally. This

Government has turned its back on commuters. It does not recognise the importance of commuter car parks. If it did, this situation would never have arisen. If the State Government cared about people having a safe place to park when they are catching a train this issue would not have to be raised today.

Mr JOHN AQUILINA (Riverstone—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.21 p.m.]: The member for Willoughby was listened to quietly as she presented her case. However, she should have checked her facts—that is becoming a characteristic of the member's contributions—as a number of the details she gave to the House today were incorrect. I have advice from the Minister that, in the brief time I have this afternoon, will show why debate on this issue is not warranted tomorrow and why we should get on with the job of building the car parking spaces, which is what people really need. The New South Wales Government is delivering on its commitment to expand commuter car parking across Sydney, the Blue Mountains, the Central Coast and the Illawarra by allocating \$170.6 million to new commuter car parks in the 2009-10 State budget.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Willoughby was heard in silence. Members will extend the same courtesy to the member for Riverstone.

Mr JOHN AQUILINA: I will get to Macarthur in a little while, but I am proud to say that these include a new commuter car park at Quakers Hill, in my electorate of Riverstone, a new commuter car park at Blacktown, in the electorate of the member for Blacktown, and a new commuter car park at Seven Hills, in the electorate of the Premier, and member for Toongabbie. This represents a major step in the New South Wales Government's commitment to provide 7,000—not 70 or 700—extra car spaces across the rail network over the next year and a half. The Government recently published a review of environmental factors for a proposed commuter car park at Macarthur and, as the member for Willoughby said accurately, that submission closed yesterday. However, the New South Wales Government is proposing a major upgrade to public transport facilities at Macarthur costing in excess of \$50 million.

The upgrade includes an additional platform, a bus interchange, accessible lifts and two new commuter car parks—not one—known as Macarthur 1 and Macarthur 2. My information from the Minister contains something that the member for Willoughby conveniently forgot to tell the House. Macarthur 1 includes a new 80-space, at-grade commuter car park adjacent to the station where disabled parking will be provided. The member told us that the disabled car parking would be half a kilometre away. Naughty, naughty! The member should check her facts. Tell the truth, Gladys. Again, the member comes to this Chamber and tries to mislead the House and the public. As demand for additional commuter car parking is growing in south-western Sydney, the Government is also committed to a new 450-space car parking station, to be known as Macarthur 2. It will be 450 metres away from the station, which is a good healthy walk.

[Interruption]

What hypocrisy from the Leader of the Opposition! Only last week he was exhorting all of us to do more walking.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: Point of order: I hope the member thinks it is funny when young women have to do that walk at night in winter. I certainly hope nothing happens, John.

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

Mr JOHN AQUILINA: Some concerns have been raised about the distance of the proposed commuter car park from the station, which is approximately 450 metres. The proposed site is the most logical piece of available land in the vicinity of the station. Other potential car park sites within a 500-metre radius of the station were considered and discounted as they were either zoned for commercial retail uses or are impacted by flooding from a local creek. The project will provide a safe pedestrian path to the station from both new car parks, including a safe crossing of Menangle Road. Again, that is something the member for Willoughby neglected to tell us. The program is a great investment; it is an investment in improving facilities for the growing number of commuters who are choosing to use the rail network. So there will be disabled car parking adjacent to the station in the 80 spaces to be provided, and there will be a safe walking path to it, including a safe crossing of Menangle Road. The member for Willoughby should get her facts straight.

The SPEAKER: Order! As members are aware, I extend a degree of latitude during these debates. However, I am not sure why!

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 37

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

Noes, 49

Mr Amery	Ms Gadiel	Ms Megarrity
Ms Andrews	Mr Gibson	Mr Morris
Mr Aquilina	Mr Greene	Mrs Paluzzano
Ms Beamer	Mr Harris	Mr Pearce
Mr Borger	Ms Hay	Mrs Perry
Mr Brown	Mr Hickey	Mr Sartor
Ms Burney	Ms Hornery	Mr Shearan
Ms Burton	Ms Judge	Mr Stewart
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	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Firth	Ms McKay	Mr Ashton
Mr Furolo	Ms McMahon	Mr Martin

Question resolved in the negative.

Motion negatived.

BUSINESS OF THE HOUSE

Business Lapsed

General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices) Nos 491 to 497 will lapse on Thursday 29 October 2009 pursuant to Standing Order 105 (3).

ASSENT TO BILLS

Assent to the following bills reported:

Real Property Amendment (Land Transactions) Bill 2009
Liquor and Registered Clubs Legislation Amendment Bill 2009
Major Events Bill 2009
Rural Fires Amendment Bill 2009

CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY

YourSpin! Youth Engagement Campaign

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.35 p.m.]: Young people are our most important asset. This positive motion is about engaging young people in the community, which is why it deserves precedence this afternoon. Young people are often portrayed in a negative fashion in the media. This afternoon all members should give this motion priority because we, as a Parliament, should promote positive youth engagement. I note that junior directors from the Bendigo Bank at Wyong are in the gallery. I am sure they would like this motion to have precedence this afternoon. The youth of any nation is its future. If we are to engage this younger generation and interest them in the future of our State we need to communicate with them. We need to reflect the changing nature of communication, which is what this youth engagement campaign has done.

This motion deserves priority. Instead of hoping that young people will show an interest in future projects and asking them to comment through more traditional means we have adapted our methods and we have gone directly to them through methods and means with which they can relate and which they are accessing daily. As a Government we have clearly demonstrated that we are listening and ready to respond to them, and we have been rewarded by their input. They are telling us how they want their youth budget spent. This motion deserves priority. Through initiatives such as this we will help to overcome the frustrations expressed in the past by our young people. In the past there has been a lack of opportunities for them to become involved. However, this Government is listening and it is changing the way in which we are relating to, and working with, young people.

Surveys have shown that very few young people plan to become involved in politics. This type of initiative will change that. It is important for members to hear about this initiative so that we can communicate with young people and establish what they want in their communities. By listening to the needs of the young we can ensure that the money that is spent is effective, channelled into projects that will have a positive effect, and supported by the people who will benefit the most. During this trial program in two months 8,200 people signed up to the site—that is, 70 visitors a day—and 2,026 voted for nominated projects. Too often we are faced by apathy and indifference.

This project will reach the people who count—the stakeholders who will be affected by the Government's youth budget decisions—and it will make it easy for them to become involved. It also shows that the Government is a relevant and dynamic organisation, not a bunch of stuffy older people who do not know or remember what it is like to be young. This motion deserves priority this afternoon because the implications for the future of our State are immense. These young people will be our future leaders. Engaging and encouraging them to take an active interest in what is happening at a government level will mean they are more likely to be involved later on, which can only help our State and nation go from strength to strength. This positive motion about young people deserves priority this afternoon.

Prisoner Phillip Choon Tee Lim Early Release

Mr GREG SMITH (Epping) [3.39 p.m.]: Without in any way playing down the importance of our youth, it is not right that the Government does not get the criticism that it deserves for its actions in relation to the important issue about which I wish to speak today, that is, the question of the early release of one of the killers of Dr Victor Chang without the relatives of Dr Victor Chang being consulted or told, or the Government making a submission to object to the early release despite being invited to do so.

Victor Chang was a national icon. In many ways he remains so through the Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute. Victor Chang carried out the first successful heart transplant in this country. He was an original thinker and saw the need for research and development of various cardiothoracic devices. His funeral at St Mary's Cathedral attracted one of the largest crowds ever to attend a funeral in this city. What happened to him? Two men wanting to extort money from him after having learned of his fame decided to take that money or to hold him hostage. In the process Victor Chang was shot dead. Apparently the 18-year non-parole period for one of those men is about to expire.

The Government did not forward any submissions, as it often does, opposing that prisoner's release, particularly bearing in mind that this prisoner will not be subject to the normal parole requirements. Despite this prisoner living in Melbourne prior to the murder, on his release he will be deported to Malaysia, his home

country, and will not be required to undergo any terms of parole. In Malaysia he can do anything that would breach parole in Australia and send him back to jail with impunity unless, of course, his actions constitute a local offence and he faces Malaysian authorities. It is a disgrace that Victor Chang's relatives were not even contacted about the imminent release of this prisoner. What excuse have we been given? They were not on the Victims Register. Of course, the Victims Register came into operation only in 1996.

Mr Gerard Martin: Under a Labor Government.

Mr GREG SMITH: This murder—

Mr Gerard Martin: This all happened on your watch under your rule. What a hypocrite you are.

Mr GREG SMITH: The Victims Register has shown that it is not useful because nobody bothers to put on the Victims Register all the victims whose relatives have been killed prior to 1996, of which there would be scores.

Mr Gerard Martin: You are an absolute hypocrite. It was under your system.

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

Mr GREG SMITH: Many people who committed murder prior to 1996 are serving determinate jail sentences and also will come up for parole. That is the urgency of this motion. What is the Government doing? What is the Minister, John Robertson, doing by not ensuring that relatives of victims are notified so they can be given the opportunity to make submissions to the parole authority? Does he not know who is coming up for parole?

Mr Gerard Martin: Why didn't you put the system in place?

Mr GREG SMITH: The Opposition understands that the parole authority had no material before it arguing against the release of this prisoner. The Government, through the Department of Corrective Services, decided not to do anything. We have had no explanation from this lame-duck Minister, who cannot seem to concentrate on why his department did not forward any submissions.

Mr Gerard Martin: Where is the DPP, your former employer?

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! The member for Bathurst will cease interjecting.

Mr GREG SMITH: We have no explanation why no attempt was made to contact the members of Victor Chang's family. They are not hard to find; they are closely involved with the successful Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute, which now has over 130 researchers working for it and for charity doing great work in heart research in honour of Victor Chang. This Government did not think that was important enough—"Oh no, let's not bother about contacting those people." Does this amount to some kind of concern about the tall poppy syndrome because Victor Chang was a great man—

Mr Gerard Martin: That's ridiculous.

Mr GREG SMITH: —and because his family helped set up a cardiac institute to serve the world?

Mr Gerard Martin: That's absolutely ridiculous. You're an absolute grub.

Mr GREG SMITH: Is that why we will not bother them, because we do not want to bother ourselves? Is it the fact that it would be cheaper to deport this man to Malaysia rather than look after him in New South Wales and keep him under—

Mr Gerard Martin: Point of order: I am loath to take a point of order but the matter being debated is why this matter should be given urgency. This man was sentenced under your regime by your party.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order!

Mr Gerard Martin: Any of this is down to you. You are being absolutely hypocritical.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order!

Mr Gerard Martin: You were part of the discredited DPP that stuffed things up.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! There is no point of order. Members will cease interjecting. The member for Epping has the call.

Mr GREG SMITH: It is understandable that emotions are high on this issue because the community is absolutely outraged and the Government was so embarrassed that it caused the parole authority to reverse its decision less than 24 hours after the balloon went up. That does not happen often. This Government actually does not often admit defeat or error. It has done so this time and deserves to wear that error. The community of this State must realise—

Mr Steve Whan: Have you protected any people with child pornography lately?

Mr GREG SMITH: —that this broken Government cannot even look after the children of Victor Chang or his widow.

Mr Steve Whan: Tipped off any other criminals yet?

Mr GREG SMITH: They will not give any assistance to them or to the community. Shame, I say, shame!

Mr Gerard Martin: You're good at tipping people off. Why didn't you tip them off like you did your mate Power?

Mr GREG SMITH: Go back to your cage, Bundy.

Mr Gerard Martin: You are an absolute disgrace.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order!

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 48

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

Noes, 36

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

Question resolved in the affirmative.

PRISONER PHILLIP CHOON TEE LIM EARLY RELEASE**Privilege**

Mr GREG SMITH (Epping) [3.49 p.m.]: I wish to raise a matter of privilege.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will hear briefly from the member for Epping.

Mr GREG SMITH: During debate the member for Bathurst, Mr Martin, impugned my character by interjection. He suggested that I showed improper favour to disgraced former Crown Prosecutor Patrick Power. The member for Monaro and Minister for Emergency Services also suggested I should concentrate further on pornography. I reject that I have committed any infringement or misdemeanours in any way. I ask that those comments be categorically denied and withdrawn.

The SPEAKER: Order! The matter will be up to the members involved to resolve. The member for Epping has made his point.

PRISONER PHILLIP CHOON TEE LIM EARLY RELEASE**Personal Explanation**

Mr STEVE WHAN, by leave: I wish to make a personal explanation.

The SPEAKER: Order! This is not a matter for debate. The statement has been made, as I pointed out to the member for Epping.

Mr STEVE WHAN: I wish to make a personal explanation.

The SPEAKER: Order! I will hear the personal explanation.

Mr STEVE WHAN: The member opposite has put on the record words that I did not say in this place. I did not suggest that he go off and look at more pornography; what I commented on was that he tipped off a colleague about a case. He has spent his time making grubby allegations about members on the Government side of the House.

The SPEAKER: Order! I have heard sufficient from the Minister. That matter is concluded.

YOURSPIN! YOUTH ENGAGEMENT CAMPAIGN**Motion Accorded Priority**

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyang—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.53 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) congratulates the Government on its trial of the innovative online youth engagement campaign YourSpin!; and
- (2) calls on the Opposition to join with the Government and confirm its commitment to the young people of this State.

It gives me great pleasure to support the motion. YourSpin! is the first program of its type in Australia. Through the program the Government has been able to communicate with young people of wide-ranging ages and in widespread locations like never before. The Government recently completed the youth online consultation project in the Central Coast and Northern New South Wales areas. Through this project we investigated if and how young people would engage in government decision-making and, importantly, we have now delivered on their requests. We have handed young people \$400,000 in funding for youth projects of their choice. Together with the member for The Entrance and the Minister for Juvenile Justice, Minister for Volunteering, Minister for Youth, and Minister Assisting the Premier on Veterans' Affairs, I visited Erina on the Central Coast to launch the program.

Social media are the best way to connect with young people. It is their preferred way of communicating with all their friends, and it is therefore no surprise that it will be their preferred way of communicating with the Government. This is a big step forward for government in Australia. It is an innovative way of involving young people in government decisions. And, most importantly, this program has worked. We began with research conducted by social media experts Small World Social. The researchers discovered that young people from the Central Coast and northern New South Wales were predominantly using: MySpace, Bebo, and MSN's instant messenger service, with average usage of approximately two hours each day.

With that in mind the Government used a mixture of social networking technologies to engage young people. An interactive game was designed and a viral marketing campaign was put in place encouraging young people to vote on the short-listed proposals for funding allocations in their local areas. This campaign included the use of social media sites such as MySpace, YouTube and Bebo; Blogs and forums; a web portal specifically designed for this project; local radio; and announcements in school newsletters. With the assistance of researchers from the University of New South Wales and the Transport and Logistics Centre, the Government was able to see how young people aged between 9 and 18 would engage with government. We also wanted to explore strategies for attracting and involving young people from the Central Coast and northern New South Wales regions to the pilot project. We also wanted to assess how online social media could be used to communicate with young people, and subsequently improve government decision-making processes.

By experimenting with a number of different social engagement strategies the Government was able to communicate directly with young people. This motivated young people to tell us how they wanted their youth budget spent. The success of this project was unprecedented. In approximately two months, from February to April 2009, 8,200 people signed up to the site. There were approximately 70 visitors per day to the website and 2,026 votes for the nominated projects. One boy's comment on the site summed up the overall response from the young people:

What a wonderful thing. Finally we get to make some decisions that are actually going to affect us.

A large number of young people from regional and rural areas communicated with government, proving that online viral and media campaigns, as spearheaded by this Government in this instance, can access young people in a way that traditional means of communication cannot. An emerging body of evidence indicates that young people are less likely to participate in the democratic life of the nation through traditional political and civic institutions and forums. Young people are now more likely to participate and engage through informal and peer-driven forums and social networking sites, such as Facebook and MySpace, than by traditional means. In fact, the Whitlam Institute at the University of Western Sydney conducted a major research study throughout 2008 entitled "Young People Imagining a New Democracy".

The young people who participated in the research study indicated that they were keen to be involved in existing political decision-making processes, but said they felt frustration at the lack of opportunities available to them. The survey found that very few young people planned to get involved in formal political processes. That is why the Government has provided funding for these innovative YourSpin! pilot programs. As a result young people from across the Central Coast and northern New South Wales have cast their votes. They voted predominantly for music opportunities followed by sporting opportunities. In June this year the Government delivered for these young people. We used the choices expressed by them through the YourSpin! process to determine youth funding in these areas. As a result \$400,000 has now been allocated by the Government for a range of services in northern New South Wales and on the Central Coast. It is a funding allocation directly informed by those who will benefit from and participate in these activities.

In conclusion, the youth engagement program has demonstrated one important thing: young people care about being involved in the democratic life of the nation. Young people want to have their say in their

communities. Young people want to get involved in decision-making processes. This Government has adapted to the changing nature of communication. We have reached out to a younger audience, we have listened to them and, importantly, we have delivered for the young people of New South Wales. I commend the motion to the House.

Ms PRU GOWARD (Goulburn) [4.00 p.m.]: I move:

That the motion be amended by leaving out all words after "That" with a view to inserting instead:

this House:

- (1) notes the trial of YourSpin!, its failure as a youth communications forum and its misuse of Brighter Futures moneys; and
- (2) condemns the Government for failing to implement urgently needed youth policies such as decent accommodation for young people on bail.

The most disturbing feature of this misuse of money is that it comes from an incredibly important program for children and young people at risk. The Brighter Futures program, which has funding of \$5.5 million, is the only program for vulnerable and at-risk kids and families that need childcare, parenting intervention and a whole range of supports to ensure that their children do not end up in the care and control of the State. As it is, the program is stretched to the limit. All non-government organisations in this State know that the program is stretched, but they are desperate to get families into the program. Now we find that \$400,000 of that money will be spent on youth grants, decided by youth on a website set up with the unfortunate title of "YourSpin!".

That sums up what the Government thinks of vulnerable children and young people, because all it can offer them is an opportunity to spin for themselves. Look at it! The pilot program was run only on the Central Coast and the mid North Coast. How convenient! It was run in marginal seats that the Government might lose at the next election. I turn now to the cost. Some \$49,000 was spent on establishing the website; 12,000 people visited the website and only just over 2,000 voted. That amounts to \$24 per vote from the young people who logged onto the website. What an extraordinary waste of money to develop a website and then to receive a response like that! I bet the trial will not be repeated. And what did the young people who voted identify as priorities? Members should remember that this is money could have gone to the most vulnerable and at-risk families and children in this State to keep them away from out-of-home care, keep families together and keep children safe.

Government members are crowing about the money spent on this pilot program. Yet we find that only 2,000 young people voted for events that they believed should be given priority for funding. The list includes music events, sporting competitions, youth centres and facilities, youth initiatives—that came in at number three—sporting equipment and the environment. What does that show? It shows that the young people who voted come from what we call the middle of society. This is not about young people seeking to ensure that children and young people are better protected and that vulnerable families are looked after better. This is about young people expressing their wishes for what they would like to see as local services. One would have thought that such events could be provided by services other than the Brighter Futures program.

We repeatedly say that the Brighter Futures program is not designed for anybody other than those most at risk in the community. What a disgraceful and cynical misuse of that money! We condemn the New South Wales Government for that. Clearly, the pilot program has failed. Those 2,000 votes from 12,000 young people who logged onto the website are a joke. Only 2,000 young people thought it was worth voting. Maybe they realised that it was not for vulnerable children and families, which the Government seems to have failed to connect with. So we condemn the Government for that. We also condemn the Government because, on the same day that members opposite are crowing about a website with a disappointing vote on it, a report by hardworking non-government organisations on the perilous situation of young people on bail in this State was launched in Parliament House today. The number of young people on bail goes up every year.

This year 5,000 kids have been remanded in juvenile correction facilities because the Government has nowhere else to put them. I note that no mention was made of that report in the House this afternoon, as there should have been. The report is incredibly timely and should have been referred to by the Minister for Juvenile Justice. The Minister attended the launch of the report; all he managed was to make the paltry offer of the provision of six beds for the 5,000 kids going into juvenile detention facilities. According to the report, an overwhelming number of those kids are then not found guilty of an offence or sent to a correctional facility. They are locked up for three months because the State and the Government have tragically failed them and have nowhere to put them.

When a group of hardworking non-government organisations put together an impressive piece of research, the Government's only answer was to say, "Yes, we could do a pilot with six beds." The day for pilot programs on a range of fronts, including the YourSpin! website, is about over. If it were not for freedom of information laws, none of this would be known. The fact is that the Government never should have thought of the YourSpin! pilot program. It is simply an opportunity for the Government to collect the names of people it can commune with in marginal seats on the Central Coast and the mid North Coast. It will do nothing to better the lives of the most vulnerable children in our society.

Mr ROBERT COOMBS (Swansea) [4.07 p.m.]: I support the motion before the House. The New South Wales Government has been engaging with young people by utilising new technologies, namely, social networking sites. The popularity of these sites has opened up new means of communication. Governments from around Australia and across the globe must change and adapt to these new channels of discourse. But it is not enough simply to talk to young people; we need to deliver for these young people, provide them with services in their communities that need, want and have asked for. That is why the Government's YourSpin! Youth Engagement Program has been so successful. Not only were we able to interact with young people on their own platform; we have enabled them to make decisions about their own lives in their communities.

In the Central Coast region the Government has allocated \$200,000 to a range of local organisations. This funding will empower our communities to create and develop their own music events and sporting activities for young people—exactly what these young people wanted. Regional youth support services at Gosford have been funded to the tune of \$60,000. This funding will engage young people in the planning and delivery of music events in the Gosford local government area. The existing youth arts warehouse venue, which has been purpose-built for events of up to 250 young people, will be used. Further to this, the Indent crew, a Government-funded group of young people who are being mentored in event management, will help to manage the project. Regional youth support services will engage professional mentors in the technical and musical industries to help young people create their own event. The organisation will also use interactive websites and their existing MySpace site as part of their inclusive approach to engaging young people in their events.

In addition, Wyong Shire Council has been funded \$60,000 for music events for young people in the Wyong local government area. A committee of young people will be involved in the planning and development of a number of music events for nine-year-olds to 18-year-olds. The existing Gravity Youth Centre and the Council Youth Development Worker will be involved in the direction of the project. Gosford City Council has been funded \$20,000 to run a Battle of the Bands competition. The competition will take place at "The Hive" at Erina Fair Shopping Centre, a popular venue with young people on the Central Coast. As I have outlined, young people voted for music activities and opportunities through the YourSpin! process and the Government has delivered.

Young people also wanted us to fund sporting activities on the Central Coast. Once again, we have listened. The Department of Sport and Recreation has been funded \$60,000 for a range of additional sporting activities across the Central Coast region. Young people aged nine to 18 will be engaged in decisions about planning and delivery of these activities. Activities will be provided at various times and at a range of venues according to feedback from young people. The Department of Sport and Recreation will lead the project with assistance from local high schools.

But let us not forget the northern New South Wales region. In this region the Government has allocated \$200,000 from the Better Futures program to the Mimi Mothers Aboriginal Corporation in Bowraville to facilitate a range of youth-focused musical events. The project facilitator will manage small grants of approximately \$20,000 to existing groups to engage young people in music events across the region. Young people will be integral in the planning design and delivery of these events. We are currently looking at ways to build upon this exciting initiative.

This Government is committed to improving opportunities for young people to contribute to the life of their community. As we have said, just visiting young people and talking to them is simply not enough. Young people want to see change and they want to see results. The Rees Government is to be commended for acting to deliver for the young people of New South Wales. This is further proof that the Rees Government is absolutely committed to young people and, in the case of my local area, to young people of the Central Coast. Our commitment to young people is in stark contrast to that of the Leader of the Opposition and his colleagues. Not only is their commitment to the young people of this State light-on, but also a quick search for their policies for young people will come up with nothing, not much at all. In the face of indifference from the Opposition we will keep doing our best for the young people of this State. I call on the Opposition to join with the Government and confirm its commitment to young people. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS (Hawkesbury) [4.12 p.m.]: In speaking against the motion and in support of the amendment I first state that this Government is not intent on committing funding where it should go to help troubled youth, but instead it wastes money on the YourSpin! Program. The name of the program is ironic because the Government has proven that it is very capable of spin—something that it has done for a large part of its tenure, especially the past two terms. The Government has spun us lines about what it is doing. I am glad that many people are present in the public gallery because they will have noticed that not one member of the Government spoke with empathy. Government members do not speak on personal issues within their electorates or from what they know firsthand.

Mr David Harris: Point of order: Under the standing orders members are not allowed to be argumentative. The member for Hawkesbury is clearly provoking Government members by making outrageous statements to the effect that we do not show empathy for our communities. The speech of the member for Goulburn showed no empathy for communities. The member for Hawkesbury needs to get it right.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! There is no point of order. I am sure the member for Hawkesbury will temper his comments.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: That is exactly what we say. People in the public gallery did not hear Government members speak from personal experiences; they read speeches prepared by bureaucrats.

Mr Robert Coombs: Point of order: That is simply not true. If one reads a number of Government contributions in this House one will identify that they have spoken with both truth and empathy about the problems of young people in this State.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! There is no point of order.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am right. People in the public gallery heard every member of the Government who participated in this debate read from a prepared bureaucratic speech. I will talk about some personal experiences of the good programs for youths that are undertaken in my area of the Hawkesbury by organisations such as Westside Mission, run by my very good friend and former featherweight boxing champion, Trevor King; 180 TC, run by a wonderful young man by the name of Rhett Morris, Mal Freely and Matt Weir; and Mercy Ministries. Those organisations have turned around the lives of youths affected by drugs or alcohol and those who have been abused. It has then put them back on the street. I have seen many hundreds of such people over the past 10 years. As a matter of fact, it has been a great privilege to be involved to a very small degree with those three organisations that look after youths that fall through the cracks of society.

If this Government is going to inject funding it should put it into programs such as those. Not one of those three organisations I have mentioned receives one cent of government funding. However, they pick up the pieces and assist people who are cast aside in communities. I have gone to the Westside Mission, with which Trevor King is involved, and sometimes seen no less than 20 youths—boys, girls, young men and women—from the age of 15 to 24 years whose lives could not be explained. It is extremely sad that they have been abused in homes, maybe are alcohol affected and some young girls prostituted on the streets of King Cross. Yet after an 11-month program Trevor King of the Westside Mission achieves a 98 per cent success rate of turning around their lives and makes them responsible members of society.

I ask whether members would prefer to see the money being spent on Government spin—an on-line failure, as referred to by the shadow Minister for Community Services, and member for Goulburn—and heroin injecting rooms for people to feed their drug addiction, or to see the money injected into good programs such as those I have just referred to—

Mr David Harris: Point of order: My point of order is relevance. Although a great deal of latitude is allowed in these sorts of debates, the member for Hawkesbury is way off the mark.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! I am sure the member for Hawkesbury will return to the substance of the motion and the amendment.

Mr RAY WILLIAMS: I am more than happy to return to the amendment, which I support. We should be directing money into good programs that turn around the lives of people who have fallen through the cracks of society. We should give them a real opportunity in life. We should not be directing money into the failed policies of these drunken pirates who are just robbing the cupboards of silver, while the ship slowly—*[Time expired.]*

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.17 p.m.], in reply: The Coalition has just demonstrated why it is on that side of the Chamber and why we are in Government. Contributions of members of the Opposition contained ill-prepared argument and personal attacks and slurs, as is usual, with absolutely no substance. They are totally uninformed. They ran down a very successful program that has delivered good outcomes to young people across several communities. For their information, Better Futures funding is designed for the participation of young people—not for housing or accommodation provision, which is a different bucket of money—administered by the Commission for Children and Young People. This Government has delivered a record budget for young people.

I thank the member for Swansea for participating in this debate. He outlined the great programs that will be funded under YourSpin!. The Opposition totally wrote off this program and said it had no worth at all. If it were in government it would cut it. We hear a lot from the Opposition about what it will cut or stop, not what it will do. Clearly the Opposition does not understand how to work with young people, particularly those who are vulnerable. They should be provided opportunities and assisted to improve their skills. The Government makes sure that through such activities we also put out important community messages, such as safe partying, safe drinking practices and safe sexual practices. This program is not about people listening to bands and music; it is about getting together with community organisations and selling important messages to youths with these programs.

The Opposition has demonstrated clearly that it has a lack of understanding of how to deliver programs to young people. Programs are not delivered to young people by standing them against a wall and shouting at them. Young people have to be engaged in activities that get to their level of understanding, through the means that they enjoy. And that is how the Government needs to sell important community messages. Government members understand that clearly. As I said at the launch of the program at Erina, there were a few young bands with people learning about event management as a future career. Obviously that is not important to the Opposition; it does not want young people to have those opportunities, it does not want them to expand their horizons. I spoke to a young girl who had left school and was now part of that band. She said:

School is not for me. I tried year 11, it didn't work. But this band has given me an opportunity to develop skills that I would not otherwise be able to develop, and I am learning event management as well. This is a career that I like, and something that I would like to get involved with.

However, if the Coalition were in government it would cut that opportunity; it said it is not good enough. That young girl was developing life skills, developing opportunities, but the Coalition would cut that. Today the Opposition spokesman said, "This is a waste of time, and we will cut it." That is what she said. What would the member for Goulburn say to that young girl who told me that being part of a band provided her with an opportunity that she would not otherwise have had? She would not agree with it.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! The member for Goulburn will cease interjecting.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Clearly, she does not—

Ms Pru Goward: Put it in another program.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! The member for Goulburn will cease interjecting.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: While the member for Goulburn was absent from the Chamber she missed hearing Government members say that they understand that programs have to be wrapped in lots of different ways. Different things have to be tried and they have to be presented in different ways to get important messages through. This afternoon the member for Goulburn has written off this proposal. She thinks it is not worth it; she says she knows what is good for kids and she does not want to hear from kids. This is a pilot program and her expectation is that if a new pilot program is run every person in the world should respond to it, or it will not work, as it is not good enough. That is the opinion of members opposite; they do not understand that things grow. As the adage states: From small things big things grow. Government members understand that and are committed to young people and to putting programs in place that work.

The member for Goulburn has not worked in the disadvantaged community. She said that members on this side of the House do not have empathy. I advise her that all members on this side of the House do work in disadvantaged communities. We talk to people at their level, we go and meet with them, and we understand their needs. Today the member for Goulburn demonstrated that she has no idea of young people's needs. She has no understanding of what goes on in disadvantaged communities.

Mr Thomas George: Point of order: I ask that the member for Wyong direct his comments through the Chair, and not directly across the Chamber.

Mr DAVID HARRIS: Certainly, I am quite happy to do that.

Mr Ray Williams: To the point of order: Madam Acting Speaker—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! The member for Hawkesbury rises further to the point of order. As I was about to rule in favour of the point of order, his point of order better be good.

Mr Ray Williams: Thank you, Madam Acting-Speaker. I will not comment further as the speaking time of the member for Wyong has expired.

[Time expired.]

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! The behaviour of the member for Hawkesbury was most disorderly. I was about to rule in favour of the point of order taken by the member for Lismore. However, the member for Hawkesbury rose to take a point of order simply to disrupt the member for Wyong.

Mr Ray Williams: I was interrupted.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Ms Diane Beamer): Order! I was about to rule in favour of the point of order taken by the member for Lismore. It is disorderly for a member to interrupt me when I am about to rule on a point of order.

Question—That the words stand—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 53

Mr Amery	Ms Gadiel	Ms Megarrity
Ms Andrews	Mr Gibson	Ms Moore
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 Horner	Mr Piper
Ms Burton	Ms Judge	Mr Sartor
Mr Campbell	Ms Keneally	Mr Shearan
Mr Collier	Mr Khoshaba	Mr Stewart
Mr Coombs	Mr Koperberg	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Corrigan	Mr Lalich	Mr Terenzini
Mr Costa	Mr Lynch	Mr Tripodi
Mr Daley	Mr McBride	Mr West
Ms D'Amore	Dr McDonald	Mr Whan
Mrs Fardell	Ms McKay	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Firth	Mr McLeay	Mr Ashton
Mr Furolo	Ms McMahon	Mr Martin

Noes, 33

Mr Aplin	Mrs Hancock	Mrs Skinner
Mr Baird	Mr Hazzard	Mr Smith
Mr Baumann	Ms Hodgkinson	Mr Souris
Ms Berejiklian	Mrs Hopwood	Mr Stokes
Mr Besseling	Mr Humphries	Mr R. W. Turner
Mr Cansdell	Mr Kerr	Mr J. D. Williams
Mr Constance	Mr Merton	Mr R. C. Williams
Mr Debnam	Mr O'Dea	
Mr Dominello	Mr Piccoli	
Mr Draper	Mr Provest	<i>Tellers,</i>
Mr Fraser	Mr Richardson	Mr George
Ms Goward	Mr Roberts	Mr Maguire

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment negatived.

Motion agreed to.

**ROAD TRANSPORT (VEHICLE REGISTRATION) AMENDMENT (SPECIAL NUMBER-PLATES)
BILL 2009**

Bill introduced on motion by Ms Sonia Hornery, on behalf of Mr David Campbell.

Agreement in Principle

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.30 p.m.]: I move:

That this bill be now agreed to in principle.

The Road Transport (Vehicle Registration) Amendment (Special Number-Plates) Bill 2009 introduces some minor reforms to facilitate the granting of a concession of the Roads and Traffic Authority's [RTA] special numberplate business. These amendments are consistent with existing Government policy announced in the November 2008 New South Wales mini-budget by the Treasurer, that the lease of the RTA's special numberplate marketing business would be investigated. The special numberplate business currently resides within the RTA, providing personalised numberplates to the public for a fee. While providing a source of revenue to the New South Wales Government, the special numberplate operation within the RTA is currently not an autonomous business, but neither is it a core function of the RTA.

It is expected that a private operator will have specialised abilities beyond those within the RTA to increase the value of the business and therefore revenue from the business, while bearing a level of commercial risk that would be inappropriately taken on by a government agency. The amendments are the result of extensive consultation with the public, government agencies and business representatives with an interest in the regulation of special numberplates. The proposed regulatory approach is minimalist in nature, relying on existing requirements that the RTA issue numberplates upon registering a registrable vehicle, and the existing ability of the RTA to delegate any or all statutory functions or enter into commercial agreements.

The Road Transport (Vehicle Registration) Act 1997 and the Road Transport (Vehicle Registration) Regulation 2007 provide the RTA with the ability to register and deregister vehicles of all classes. Numberplates are a key part of the registration system and the principal identifier of a vehicle and a link to the registered operator of the vehicle. Numberplates are a critical identifier in compliance and enforcement activities for a broad range of road safety rules that govern road usage, driver behaviour and vehicle management. Examples of this include identification of speeding vehicles, monitoring heavy vehicle use for fatigue management, and identification of traffic light offences. Numberplates are also used by third parties to identify vehicles for a range of other purposes.

The bill proposes legislative and regulatory amendments to support and add value to the grant of a concession to operate the special numberplate business. Consultation has been conducted and is ongoing with non-government and government agencies with a potential interest in the special numberplate concession proposal. It is noted that the majority of feedback received in response to the targeted letters related to the potential impacts of expanding the number of characters on numberplates, and visibility of plates to optical recognition technology.

The objectives of creating the special numberplate concession are: to transfer the business risk of the future volatility in business revenues to the private sector while securing a more stable income stream for the RTA; to maximise the long-term value to the Government of its right to issue special numberplates, including beyond the term of the initial concession, subject to mitigating future earnings volatility; to generate additional business growth by the application of private sector marketing and product development resources and skills; to establish a concession structure that fully aligns the Government's interests and those of the concessionaire; to create meaningful financial incentives, and sanctions, on any future operators of the business to maximise long-term value; to deliver both a competitive outcome from offering the initial concession and implement a long-term framework for the issue and management of future concessions; and to separate the policy for and regulation of numberplates from the commercial development and marketing of that product.

One of the Government's key aims for regulation of special numberplates is to ensure that the integrity of the regulatory framework for numberplates continues undiminished. A review of the regulatory regime

applicable to numberplates in New South Wales was conducted to ensure that the Government's regulatory aims will be balanced with the objectives of the special numberplate concession through putting in place an appropriate regulatory framework.

The bill contains amendments to the Road Transport (Vehicle Registration) Act 1997 to make explicit the power of the RTA to enter into commercial arrangements for the provision of marketing and other services with respect to special numberplates; provide for the concessionaire to fix fees and charges for special numberplates and related services without a requirement for ministerial approval or gazettal, including allowing the market to fix fees for sale by public auction; broaden the definition of special numberplates to allow the RTA to determine what is a special numberplate, including to convert general issue plates to special numberplates; provide the RTA with powers to issue special numberplates independently of vehicle registration with persons who are not registered operators; provide that "issue" of a numberplate does not constitute physical possession, and includes entering into an agreement for rights to a numberplate that will not be displayed on a vehicle; and require any special numberplate arrangements to include a provision ensuring that a party to the arrangements will be subject to the same restrictions with respect to privacy and personal information protection requirements as the RTA under the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1998.

The risks to the concession are within the control of the RTA and the Government. A clear regulatory framework providing certainty around the expected level of Government and RTA intervention is critical, including a protocol for camera testing of new plate styles and content established between the RTA, the New South Wales Police Force and the State Debt Recovery Office, and rights to issue specific numberplate content will be allocated between the concessionaire and the RTA at the outset of the concession.

Rural communities and families will benefit from the Government having greater budget flexibility to allocate more resources to core services. The provision of online telephone and direct delivery options for numberplates provides rural communities with increased access to services without travelling to urban centres. To maintain equity of access to road use, a selected range of general issue plates will be reserved and remain under the direct management of the Roads and Traffic Authority. These plates will be available, and will continue to be available, as a regulated price option through motor registries at cost-recovery levels. Registration charges will not be affected by any changes to special numberplate fees that occur as a result of the concession. Consumers will in no way be compelled to enter into arrangements for special numberplates.

In summary, the scope of any concession arrangements will exclude supply of special numberplates for vehicles over 4.5 tonnes gross vehicle mass, general issue numberplates, and regulatory and conditional numberplates. The arrangements will include the potential for the concessionaire to issue plates in future that display seven to 10 characters and numeral-only plates. The arrangements will also include the potential for direct delivery mechanisms. The bill contains amendments to the Road Transport (Vehicle Registration) Act 1997 to support the grant of a concession to the special numberplate business by making explicit the power of the RTA to enter into commercial arrangements for the provision of marketing and other services with respect to special numberplates.

The bill will enable the concessionaire to fix fees and charges for special numberplates and related services without a requirement for ministerial approval or gazettal, including allowing the market to fix fees for sale by public auction. The bill will broaden the definition of special numberplates to allow the RTA to determine what is a special numberplate, including converting general issue plates to special number plates. The bill will provide the RTA with powers to issue special numberplates independently of vehicle registration with persons who are not registered operators, provided that the issue of a numberplate does not constitute physical possession. This includes entering into an agreement for rights to a numberplate that will not be displayed on a vehicle. The bill will require any special numberplate arrangements to include provisions to ensure that a party to the arrangements will be subject to the same restrictions with respect to privacy and personal information protection requirements as the Roads and Traffic Authority under the Privacy and Personal Information Protection Act 1988. I commend the bill to the House.

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

BUDGET ESTIMATES AND RELATED PAPERS

Financial Year 2009-2010

Debate resumed from an earlier hour.

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater) [4.43 p.m.]: In speaking in debate on the budget estimates and related papers I must admit that, like many members of the community, initially I was excited to hear the budget

announced as a beacon of hope for communities across New South Wales. It was with some eagerness that I, along with other members in this place and people in the community, looked at the State budget website, which provided details of the State budget. The *www.more.nsw.gov.au* website was established to give details about where the State budget would be spent. I was excited when I saw that the \$5 billion metro would come to Pittwater. According to the Government's website, a metro station was to be established on Scotland Island—an offshore community of about 1,000 residents—in my electorate of Pittwater.

The website revealed that a metro station was to be located at Pitt Point on Scotland Island. Imagine how excited members of my community and I were about this metro station. It was the only major infrastructure project the Government announced for the northern beaches. We were terribly excited about getting the metro on Scotland Island as it has been beset by transport woes. Over the years all sorts of strategies—including commuter car parks, car ferries and bridges—have been proposed to solve the transport difficulties on Scotland Island. However, no-one had embraced the pure genius of the proposal to a metro station on Scotland Island. However, that beacon of hope for the northern beaches community was quickly snuffed out in another of this Government's broken promises, and the website was changed to remove the metro station from Scotland Island.

Mr Matt Brown: With a flick of the switch!

Mr ROB STOKES: As the member for Kiama said, it occurred with a flick of the switch. The Government broke its promise to build a metro station on Scotland Island.

Ms Lylea McMahon: Your contribution to debate never ceases to amaze me.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The member for Pittwater does not need the encouragement of Government members. The member for Pittwater has the call.

Mr ROB STOKES: This points to a greater issue. Pittwater residents did not miss out on just a metro station. I still retained a measure of excitement as I thought the budget might still hold out a beacon of hope for Pittwater. It was with some excitement that I heard the then Minister for Health talking about Narrabeen hospital. I thought to myself, "Great! What a terrific idea. We do not have a hospital at Narrabeen, but the Minister must be talking about a new hospital." The problem was that the Minister got the hospital's location wrong. I think he was referring to Mona Vale Hospital, but clearly he did not know where that was. So that beacon of hope for my community of Pittwater turned out to be nothing other than a bit of a joke.

Despite what the Treasurer says about beacons of hope, my community of Pittwater remains in the dark—as it has been for the past 14 years under this Labor Government. For Pittwater residents, this budget is nothing like a beacon of hope. It provides no leadership, no vision and no solutions to the major issues being faced in our community. Whether it is the future of our health services, our congested and underfunded roads, or our inadequate public transport, Pittwater has again missed out, and residents have every right to feel abandoned by this State Government and desperate for some reprieve. In many ways, the metro announcement symbolises the disillusionment at this State Government that is felt by people in outlying areas. The Government appears to focus solely and purely on the central areas of the city while leaving the vast bulk of Sydney's suburban areas without hope.

There is no better demonstration of the abandonment of the Pittwater community than in the area of health care. Pittwater residents are desperate for some certainty about the future of their health services. For more than a decade the Government has been dangling the sword of Damocles over our local hospital at Mona Vale. That sort of uncertainty does nothing to inspire the community to rally around the excellent local hospital at Mona Vale. The community is doing everything it can to ensure a continuing future for Mona Vale Hospital, but it is hamstrung in its efforts because this Government provides no vision and no certainty about health services. Quite frankly, the Government has no idea what to do about health care on the northern beaches.

Despite promising a new hospital at Frenchs Forest back in March 2006, with a continuing role for the existing hospital at Mona Vale, the Frenchs Forest site continues to lie vacant, despite having cost taxpayers more than \$29 million on land acquisition and project planning. When the Government acquired houses on the proposed Frenchs Forest hospital site it did not lease them back to local residents who were happy to lease them and remain in them until the hospital was built. The Government bought those houses at an exorbitant cost and immediately pulled them down, leaving the whole site completely vacant and returning nothing to the taxpayers of New South Wales. With five health Ministers in five years, this Government has been shuffling responsibility for this portfolio as quickly as it has been scrapping projects and axing services.

Pittwater has paid the price for this turbulence and residents have lost all faith in the Government's ability to provide vital and long overdue improvements to our health services. It came as no surprise when I, together with my colleagues on the northern beaches—the member for Manly, the member for Wakehurst and the member for Davidson—wrote a joint letter to the health Minister asking her to meet with us and she replied that she had no interest in meeting with us and that she was not prepared to do so. She suggested that we might want instead to speak to a bureaucrat. Four members want to talk about the health issues of 250,000 residents in this State and the Minister for Health is too busy. That is very sad.

Pittwater has certainly paid the price for the turbulence and confusion in the Health portfolio. Figures released earlier this year reveal that emergency department attendances and surgical procedures at Mona Vale Hospital continue to rise steadily. This demonstrates that there is no shortage of patients, demand or need, which is hardly surprising given the ageing population and land releases in the area. At the same time the Government proposes a massive land release at Ingleside, which will add as much as 20 per cent to the number of residents, with no concrete plan in place to provide health services in the area. It is imperative to improve health services on the northern beaches and to build the promised Frenchs Forest hospital to accommodate the growing and ageing population.

Therefore, the discontent within my community can be understood when the budget revealed a 30 per cent cut in spending on health infrastructure—which is completely unfathomable given the crises occurring in the State's health system. This demonstrates that the Government is in way over its head. Unfortunately for Pittwater residents, this Government's commitment and ability to deliver improved, safe and reliable roads is as hollow as its record of maintaining, improving and investing in a certain and sustainable future for our local health services. There is a desperate need to provide improved roads to serve the burgeoning population of Pittwater—a need that this budget has failed hopelessly to address. For 14 years the people of Pittwater have pleaded with the State Government to fund essential safety improvements, and for 14 years the Government has refused.

In its 2009-10 budget submission, the NRMA stated that Mona Vale Road—Ring Road 3—requires urgent attention, yet for some unimaginable reason this view is not shared by this State Government. The problems presented by Mona Vale Road will not simply go away, and the Government cannot continue to bury its head in the sand, as it has done in this budget. Mona Vale Road is a major arterial road for northern Sydney that carries increasing traffic volumes. Inaction has meant that Mona Vale Road has become a serious road safety embarrassment for this State Government, especially when 466 people have died on the State's roads in the past 12 months, which is an increase of 82 fatalities on the same time last year—but I understand more fatalities have occurred since I obtained those figures yesterday.

Labor's response to the long-term safety problems of Mona Vale Road has simply involved placing the project within the State Infrastructure Strategy. This is best described as Labor's too-hard basket, where the infrastructure needs of New South Wales are placed whilst the Government comes up with excuses for not funding them. Unfortunately for Pittwater residents, Mona Vale Road remains in this too-hard basket and this budget does nothing to fund its essential and long-overdue upgrades. The section of Pittwater Road between Mona Vale central business district and McCarrs Creek faces a similar predicament. This rapidly deteriorating road, which faces increased urban consolidation pressures along its length, is another shocking example of Labor's inept attitude to road safety upgrades in Pittwater over the past 14 years.

Not only has the Government continually failed to invest in any permanent long-term solutions—realising the seriousness of the situation and the terrible condition it has allowed the road to reach—it also has moved to wash its hands of the road by attempting to transfer responsibility to Pittwater Council. This desperately low act demonstrates the inability of this Government to maintain the State's infrastructure and its attempts to avoid responsibility. The Wakehurst Parkway is another vital road artery in Pittwater, and again it has been neglected in this disappointing budget. This is despite the Government acknowledging the frequent flooding of that road—it was cut by floodwaters again on the weekend—and its importance to the viability of the proposed Frenchs Forest hospital. Whether the Frenchs Forest hospital is built is irrelevant because this Government seems intent on making people believe it will do something when it has no such plan.

The Wakehurst Parkway provides a vital link for tens of thousands of motorists each day. The Government cannot keep putting off upgrades to essential infrastructure while it shuffles papers and delays the construction of the hospital. If Lord Wakehurst were alive today he would be ashamed to have the road named after him and ashamed of this State Government for refusing to improve what is a blatant necessity for residents

of the northern beaches. With nothing coming from this budget to address Pittwater's major concerns, residents have become increasingly aware that they are being used as cash cows by this State Government—giving, giving, giving but receiving nothing in return.

If the State Government wants to continue the residential and commercial development of the Pittwater area and reap the financial rewards it delivers to the State's coffers, then improvements to Pittwater's vital infrastructure are essential. However, this budget has ignored this factor altogether by clearly taking an "it'll be right" approach to the ailing infrastructure on the northern beaches. But it will not be all right, and residents of the northern beaches simply will not accept the excuses of this State Government. The Government is simply not providing the infrastructure needed to accommodate the changes occurring in Pittwater. Public transport is another area where Pittwater residents are screaming for improvement, yet they are constantly getting a raw deal from this State Government. Pittwater's public transport users are being forced to fight tooth and nail even to retain our vital bus services, let alone attract increased funding and services.

The State Government is trying to promote the use of public transport in order to ease traffic congestion, reduce carbon emissions and combat drink driving, but it is ridiculous that we continually have to fight to retain our bus services. Many Pittwater residents have contacted me to say they want to make the switch to public transport but are being discouraged by the Labor Government's failure to meet the growing demand. Any commuter travelling to the Sydney central business district from Pittwater in the morning will say that the majority of Pittwater's buses are standing room only well before they reach Narrabeen. Commuters then stand on a crowded bus for more than 40 minutes—sometimes for up to an hour—simply to travel to work and then home in the evening. How can residents be encouraged to use public transport if it means that they will be forced to stand for more than an hour on their way to work? It is no surprise that more people use public transport to get to work from the Central Coast to Sydney than from Pittwater to Sydney.

Demand for public transport on the northern beaches simply does not match what is supplied by the State Government, and that issue must be addressed urgently. Commuters are not the only people who are feeling the funding restraints of this State Labor Government. Bus drivers in the Pittwater community are screaming out for improved onboard security measures. I was appalled to learn that Sydney Buses employs only 55 transit security guards on its entire network, and of those only four are deployed regularly to the Pittwater area, despite Pittwater bus services being notoriously dangerous on Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. The Government's completely inadequate response to the onboard safety of drivers and passengers would be laughable if it were not such a serious issue. Sparsely placed security guards armed with nothing but a yellow vest and notebook are not a responsible solution—they are simply a cheap token gesture.

Substantially increased funds must be allocated to protect our bus drivers and innocent passengers, who should not have to feel frightened and alone when travelling on public transport. Despite pleas for help from its employees and from members of the public, the Labor Government has failed to deliver any reprieve in this budget. There is no doubt that this budget is full of disappointments, missed opportunities and broken promises for Pittwater residents. Far from being a beacon of hope, the budget is simply a joke. The people of Pittwater deserve more. They are hardworking people who are passionate about the area in which they live. Yet they are constantly being let down by a Labor Government that has failed in its economic management of the budget, failed in its economic management of the State, failed to invest properly in our ailing and inadequate infrastructure, failed to identify where service shortfalls exist and failed to plan for our future.

Pittwater continues to feel the extent of Labor's failure of the people of New South Wales. This budget does nothing except forecast more of the same. It is laughable for the Treasurer to claim that this budget is a beacon of hope because it contains nothing but a further kick in the guts for the long-suffering residents of Pittwater. As a result, I will continue to work hard on behalf of the people of Pittwater to hold this Government to account and to strive for a better deal for my community.

Ms LYLEA McMAHON (Shellharbour—Parliamentary Secretary) [4.59 p.m.]: It is with pleasure that I participate in debate on the budget estimates for 2009-10. This year's budget is all about investing in jobs throughout New South Wales. The budget provides for a better future not only for the people of New South Wales but also for the people who live in my electorate of Shellharbour. The budget has delivered a record \$62.9 billion building program over the next four years—the largest infrastructure investment program in New South Wales history—and at the same time has maintained the State's triple-A credit rating in what was, and continues to be, the worst global financial circumstance. In that context and in the current economic environment New South Wales certainly is performing well. The 2009-10 budget provides a record level of infrastructure investment without introducing any new taxes.

Mr Matt Brown: Hear! Hear!

Ms LYLEA McMAHON: That is certainly a significant achievement.

Mr Matt Brown: I agree.

Ms LYLEA McMAHON: I note the comments made by the member for Kiama: it is a record achievement. The Government has delivered a record \$53.9 billion of investment in essential front-line services for New South Wales families, especially families in the Shellharbour electorate. In relation to the record \$15.1 billion health budget, the Shellharbour electorate has certainly benefited significantly. The allocation of \$528,000 will facilitate the appointment of six clinical support officers, and that will enable doctors and nurses to spend less time on paperwork and more time on caring for patients. Recruitment for those six clinical support officers already has commenced.

The budget also provides for doubling the number of renal chairs from 6 to 12, which will provide lifesaving dialysis for 48 additional patients a week. After presentation of the budget I visited patients at the Shellharbour Hospital, who are looking forward to the expansion of the service. Recruitment has commenced for two junior medical officers as part of a current recruitment drive to appoint 45 additional medical officers. This is the result of \$42 million being invested over four years to increase the number of doctors in New South Wales by 3,000. The 2009-10 budget also provides for the construction of a six-bed child and adolescent inpatient unit at the Shellharbour Hospital. The unit will be provided on top of investment that already has been part of construction at the Shellharbour Hospital since I was elected to Parliament.

The Government has provided \$15.7 million for enhancements in mental health services alone. That includes the new 20-bed mental health rehabilitation unit and the child and adolescent day unit that already have opened at the Shellharbour Hospital. The six-bed child and adolescent inpatient unit at the Shellharbour Hospital builds on expanding facilities that have been provided to improve mental health services in the Illawarra, particularly in the Shellharbour electorate. I draw to the attention of the House that a significant number of enhancements already have been delivered as a result of previous Labor budgets to the Shellharbour Hospital. These enhancements include increased recurrent funding of \$3.4 million, which was allocated in July 2007 to provide improved health services at the Shellharbour Hospital, and has resulted in an increase in the number of general medical teams from three to four.

There also has been a \$4.4 million redevelopment of the Shellharbour Hospital's emergency department, which was opened in August during the budget year 2004-05. This exemplifies the Government's strategy of constantly building up services and providing improved services for the Shellharbour electorate. That contrasts with the former Liberal-Nationals Government when, in health alone, there was closure of Kiama Hospital, deferral of an upgrade of Wollongong Hospital and cancellation of the oncology unit at Wollongong Hospital. The site is now a big muddy swamp full of mosquitoes.

Mr Rob Stokes: You were not born then.

Ms LYLEA McMAHON: I had all three of my children at Wollongong Hospital, and two of them were born when the cancellations occurred.

Mr Matt Brown: Did they get a bite from the mosquitoes?

Ms LYLEA McMAHON: They certainly did, and that was very disappointing. The Illawarra was neglected under the Liberal-Nationals whereas under Labor, which invests in services and support for families, community facilities have improved. The budget also provides a record \$6.2 billion for police. Part of the funds will be used to construct a new police station costing \$17 million near the border of my electorate with the Kiama electorate. The Lake Illawarra Local Area Command police station is under construction as I speak. The project supports 400 construction jobs in the Illawarra. That certainly proves that the Rees Government supports policing in the Shellharbour electorate and the Illawarra region. The Government is committed to the completion of this three-storey building, which will house 244 staff. It is expected to be completed by late next year.

Mr Matt Brown: A very impressive erection.

Ms LYLEA McMAHON: It is a very impressive building. The Shellharbour electorate has received an increase in authorised police strength from 169 under the Coalition Government to 228 in October 2008,

which represents 59 additional police officers, or a 34.9 per cent increase. That is more evidence to demonstrate that the people in the Shellharbour electorate continue to be looked after and supported by Labor governments, whereas under Liberal governments they are neglected. With the support provided by the Government, police have been successfully driving down crime. All 17 major crime categories have remained stable in the Lake Illawarra Local Area Command.

The budget builds on initiatives provided by past budgets, including the delivery of the second mobile police station to the Lake Illawarra Local Area Command. The member for Kiama attended the ceremony to mark its arrival. The Government has provided a \$50,000 grant to Shellharbour City Council for its domestic violence prevention program. Since I became a member of this House Lake Illawarra Area Command has had rolled out 10 domestic violence kits for mobile police stations, three additional domestic violence liaison officers and two community intensive support-domestic violence caseworkers. This Government is continuing to deliver to support families and people in need in the Shellharbour electorate—not just in this year's budget but in every year's budget. Year after year the Government builds upon improved and enhanced services to benefit the people of the Shellharbour electorate.

The Government has provided a record \$14.7 billion education budget. This has resulted in \$240,000 being provided for new guttering at Dapto High School, funding to upgrade classrooms at Kanahooka High School, funding for roof upgrades at Warilla North and Barrack Heights public schools, and 12 new or pre-apprenticeship training positions in automotive trades at Shellharbour TAFE. I attended the Shellharbour TAFE graduation and was impressed by the really wonderful young people who are participating in the program. Yesterday I referred to more than \$3 million in upgrades currently taking place at Oak Flats High School. The upgrades include funding for construction of the administration block that is currently underway, upgrade of kitchen and commercial cookery facilities, upgrading of access facilities and toilet blocks, and providing an elevator for students with a disability so that they can have easy access to and from all the floors of the high school. After the refurbishments have been carried out it will be almost a completely new high school. Certainly Oak Flats High School has a very proud reputation.

The Shellharbour electorate also is benefiting from improved educational facilities, such as the refurbishment of science laboratories at Kanahooka High School, Oak Flats High School, Warilla High School and Lake Illawarra High School. These are part of the Government's initiatives to support young people, support education and ensure that young people have a brighter future.

The budget also invests in roads. Yesterday during debate on the motion accorded priority the member for Kiama and I talked about the opening of the new, dual carriageway Dunmore to Oak Flats link of the Princes Highway. This piece of road will significantly improve the trip for commuters from Kiama to Shellharbour and tourists travelling down the South Coast on weekends. Indeed, the member for South Coast commented that it is an excellent piece of infrastructure. The Government is continuing to invest in important infrastructure and to support the community. Some \$3.5 million has been allocated to upgrade and maintain local roads in the Shellharbour electorate.

Yesterday in this House I spoke about the important work being done on Shellharbour Road to remove black spots and to improve safety, including safety treatments at traffic lights and moving telegraph poles back from the side of the road to remove collision dangers. The Government has allocated \$12.7 million to upgrade Dapto zone substation to increase distribution capacity to cater for growth. That zone substation is currently under construction. We have also invested \$30,000 for Yallah Bay boat ramp and \$30,000 for Reddall Reserve boat ramp. Both of these projects are improving the amenity and use of Lake Illawarra.

Furthermore, \$6.8 million has been allocated for rail maintenance and capital works, including track maintenance. Again, that is creating and generating jobs in the Shellharbour electorate and supporting working families. In relation to the Shellharbour State Emergency Service unit, \$40,000 has been allocated to help purchase two new trucks. The service does an important job, particularly in adverse circumstances such as storm events. These important resources support the job done by the service. The Shellharbour State Emergency Service unit works very hard in the area. The Shellharbour electorate will benefit significantly from the budget allocation for housing. Some \$5 million has been allocated for maintenance upgrades to social housing in the Shellharbour electorate, as well as \$3.6 million for new community living accommodation for six people with a disability.

This builds on new community accommodation that has already been delivered. A project in Conway Crescent opened in February this year, providing supported accommodation for four young women with a

disability. T Such services make a real difference to people with a disability and their families in the Shellharbour electorate. Some \$3.14 million has been allocated for 11 homes for people in need in Shellharbour and \$1.32 million has been allocated for people in need in Warilla as part of stage one of the nation building economic stimulus plan. Other important initiatives announced in the 2009-10 State Budget invest in jobs and are part of the record \$62.9 billion building program. It is the largest infrastructure investment program in New South Wales history and maintains the State's triple-A credit rating.

One initiative is the housing construction acceleration plan, which provides a 50 per cent cut to stamp duty for all newly constructed dwellings up to the value of \$600,000 purchased in New South Wales until 31 December. This saves up to \$11,245 per dwelling for people buying property, including investors. This is an important issue in the Shellharbour electorate as it is a growing residential community. The plan also benefits the construction industry: a significant number of tradespeople live in the Shellharbour electorate. This initiative is a way of boosting construction and supporting people who want to enter the housing market. First home buyers received an additional \$3,000 for the purchase of a newly constructed dwelling. This means that the total benefits available to first home buyers until the end of September were just over \$41,000.

Those two important programs support construction, support people buying new houses in the Shellharbour electorate and support tradespeople living in the Shellharbour electorate. Another initiative announced in the budget is the community building partnership program. The grants program has been overwhelmingly popular in the Shellharbour electorate. The Government has allocated \$400,000 to the Shellharbour electorate for community groups to access grants to undertake projects, including amenity blocks, refurbishments, roofing, and so on. A forum I organised so that community groups could get information about how to apply for a grant was well attended and there was a lot of interest. I look forward to the announcement about the successful grants.

The 2009-10 State Budget has many fantastic initiatives to invest in jobs. The budget was delivered in difficult global financial circumstances but it delivered record investment in building programs—the largest infrastructure investment program in New South Wales history. It also delivered a triple-A credit rating, ensuring that New South Wales continues to be healthy. The last time the Liberal Party was in government all it delivered to the Illawarra was cuts to services. It closed Kiama Hospital. [*Quorum called for.*]

[*The bells having been rung and a quorum having formed, business resumed.*]

[*Extension of time agreed to.*]

The last time the Opposition was in Government it cut services in the Illawarra, closed Kiama Hospital, cancelled the upgrade of Wollongong Hospital, but left a huge swamp in the grounds, axed the Maldon to Dombarton rail link and downgraded or cut a range of services in the Illawarra. In my contribution I have demonstrated that the Labor Government continues to deliver for the Illawarra. It delivers investment in infrastructure and improved services and enhances services year in, year out for the community of Shellharbour. The Opposition identified in its reply to the budget \$3.9 billion worth of revenue cuts but increased costs of \$36 billion, leaving a budget black hole of nearly \$40 billion. That certainly demonstrates its lack of economic credibility in managing the State's affairs. On the other hand, the Government has delivered a record \$6.29 billion building program, a triple-A credit rating and improved services in the electorate of Shellharbour.

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

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! Government business having concluded, the House will now proceed to private members' statements.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [5.22 p.m.]: From 24 October to 1 November is Children's Week, an annual festival that includes universal Children's Day today. Last Friday a celebration was held at the Nimbin Community Centre. This week Children's Choice is raising awareness about the Federal Government's funding of early childhood education. Members represent a lot of areas that have great community preschools that play a

very important part in our community by providing children in small communities with early intervention and early childhood education. A few weeks ago New South Wales announced an agreement with the Federal Government to work toward achieving universal access to preschools. I believe that New South Wales received something like \$278 million and has agreed to increase the level of funding to preschools, as well as contribute towards the cost of employing qualified teachers. This is great news but the truth is that New South Wales still falls below other States and Territories when it comes to access, equity and affordability. New South Wales is still the lowest investor in early childhood education.

I pay tribute to Bianca Urbina from the Channon area, who has been a great advocate for early childhood education. She has represented the area very well and as coordinator of the Children's Choice Preschool Campaign this week she approached me to congratulate the Commonwealth Government's bilateral agreements on achieving universal access to early childhood education a few weeks ago. But are these measures enough? What about the other actions the New South Wales Government has committed to? How does New South Wales compare with other States? The Commonwealth Government has committed \$278.6 million in New South Wales to achieve universal access but has been unable to get the Rees Labor Government to spend a single additional dollar of its own money. Given that New South Wales spends way less on preschool education than other States do, this disparity will always remain. Participation rates in other States will continue to be higher than in New South Wales because fees will remain high, despite the long overdue increase in funding.

On a number of occasions Bianca has pointed out to me, the Minister, the department and the community that opportunities for young children to attend community preschool need to be increased but as the fees are so high, especially in country and regional areas, parents cannot afford them. Baseline data for every State shows the average cost of a preschool education in each State. In Victoria the average fee per week is \$30.08. In Tasmania it is \$210 a year. In the Australian Capital Territory and the Northern Territory preschool programs are free. In Queensland 63 per cent of families pay less than \$39 per week. In Western Australia families pay \$5 per week. In New South Wales the average is \$28.30 a day, not a week, and the figure is down that low only by including the average fee of the 100 Department of Education and Training preschools with the 800 community-based ones. [*Time expired.*]

CARRINGTON COMPUTER CLUB FOR SENIORS

Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN (Camden) [5.27 p.m.]: It was my great pleasure to attend and be guest speaker of the annual general meeting of the Carrington Computer Club for Seniors on 12 October 2009 at the Carrington Recreation Hall. Carrington Retirement Village is part of the outstanding Carrington Centennial Care, which has on the site a retirement village, assisted living, hostel care, a nursing home, community care services, carer's respite service and recreation facilities. In my opinion Carrington is not only the premier operation of its type in Macarthur but a leading facility in Australia. Full details of Carrington can be found at carringtoncare.com.au.

I could take all of my time and talk about Carrington but I want also to focus on the Carrington Computer Club for Seniors formed by the residents of Carrington. When I arrived for the meeting I was met by Rollo Doust, the promotions coordinator, and was then happy to meet president Frank Shuttleworth and the new secretary, Anne Bartyn. Anne had only just been convinced to do the job—we all know how hard it is to be secretary of any organisation and I particularly congratulate Anne. I was the last speaker on the agenda and I was impressed by the smooth running of the meeting, which got through items very quickly.

At the meeting I was happy to see the excellent state of the club's finances, which, from memory, aggregated about \$28,000 for the upgrade of computer equipment and software. Treasurer Les Langston suggested I not get too carried away about the \$28,000, because he planned to approach the State Government for additional funds. I told him that, as always, we would be happy to look at any request from the Carrington Computer Club for Seniors. The club has a membership of 301, and there was a large turnout at the meeting. The minutes of the general meeting held on 7 September 2009, under the heading "Training Co-Ordinator's Report", give a rundown of the courses offered. They state:

In August, two Introduction to Computer Courses, an Internet Course and a Digital Photography Course were completed and replaced by a Spreadsheet, Greeting Cards and two Digital Photography Courses. On 2nd September a Word Processing Course commenced and a second Word Course is due to commence later in the month. Julie thanked the helpers and trainers for their assistance.

Julie is the training coordinator. The hardworking committee that was appointed at the annual general meeting on 12 October 2009 comprises: the President, Frank Shuttleworth; the Vice-President, Phil Dale; the Treasurer,

Les Langston; the Secretary, Anne Bartyn; the Training Coordinator, Julie Holder; the Technical Officer, Jim Cook; the Publicity Officer, Rollo Doust; the Assistant to the committee, Eric Dixon; and the Purchasing Officer, Mary Dale. The club does a fantastic job in keeping seniors up to date with the digital age and its training courses are excellent. It was only two weeks ago that I attended a function in Parliament House about the challenge of an ageing society. One of the key points was to make sure you keep your brain active. The Carrington Computer Club for Seniors certainly does that—there are a lot of active brains attending its functions.

As I told the club's members, I always look forward to getting my copy of "The Dialog Box". Previously I received it in hard copy, but now it arrives electronically. It is an informative publication, and also good reading. Tonight I pay particular tribute to Les Langston, the current treasurer. Les will modestly say otherwise, but he did all the heavy lifting in the early years to get the Carrington Computer Club for Seniors off the ground. He managed to obtain grants from all levels of government, as well as members' fees to enable that wonderful club to be established. Les has given 10 years of his life and worked hard to get the club up and running. Despite having a couple of years off, he is still there and still enjoys going to all its functions.

I congratulate Les, who is still a very active member of the club. I know that Ministers who have visited the facility have always been impressed by his ability to lobby them for funding. I congratulate the Carrington Computer Club for Seniors. It does a fantastic job. I pay tribute to its committee and all the members. I thank them for the welcome they gave me, the attention they paid to my address, and the grilling I got in question time. It was one of the hardest I have attended, with the most thoughtful questions I have ever experienced.

HOLBROOK SUBMARINE MUSEUM

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [5.32 p.m.]: I have spoken previously about the town of Holbrook, the origins of its name and why there is a full-size submarine hull visible from the town's main street. The story of Holbrook continues to evolve. On Sunday 18 October 2009 I attended the opening of the Hologram Exhibition at the Holbrook Submarine Museum. It was the launch of a new and enthralling chapter in the story of the town and of the people involved in establishing Holbrook as the "Home of Submariners". The hologram, created by Brian Shirley, depicts the image of a younger Gundula Holbrook, widow of Commander Norman Holbrook, VC, telling the story of his wartime exploits and explaining how the town came to be named in his honour in 1915.

The 15-centimetre image of Mrs Holbrook, played by actor Roslyn Oates, walks among artefacts and B11 submarine memorabilia, while sailors scramble from the miniature submarine, and gunfire and torpedoes explode around her. The 18-minute presentation drew spontaneous and enthusiastic applause from the audience. It was a delight to watch. It is appropriate that Gundula Holbrook should steal the show, for she has been an integral part of the development of the museum over the last 15 years. Mrs Holbrook is the only surviving link between the town and Commander Holbrook himself, who had visited many times before his death in 1976. In 1982 his widow presented his medals to the museum as her first generous donation. At this hologram launch school students Jessica Todd and Laura Fenton from Holbrook Public School and Anna Rossiter from St Patrick's School assisted Roger Cooper in the symbolic handover of the medals of Commander Norman Holbrook, VC, RN, to the director of the Australian War Memorial.

In 1995, following the Navy's gift to Holbrook of the decommissioned HMAS *Otway*'s fin, a working party was formed to obtain and install a full-size submarine. Finance was the biggest hurdle. Despite enthusiastic local supporters raising several thousand dollars, the target remained hopelessly out of reach. Then Gundula Holbrook unexpectedly stepped in with another generous gift—a cheque for \$100,000 to enable the project to be completed. She attended the official opening of the spectacular traffic-stopping memorial on 7 June 1997, as the honoured guest. Her involvement did not stop there. About 10 months ago Mr Roger Cooper, Chairman of the Holbrook Submarine Museum and Visitor Information Committee, approached council with the hologram project. Former submariner Roger and the committee hoped to enhance the museum and stimulate even more tourism interest, particularly as the Hume Highway will bypass the town in 2012.

Greater Hume Shire Council was enthusiastic about the project but able to provide only a portion of the funding required. Therefore the committee approached Mrs Holbrook. She was delighted with the idea of the hologram telling the story of Commander Holbrook and the town. She came to the rescue again and gave another large sum to enable the project to be completed. The seating was designed and made in Holbrook and the stage set inside is an exact scale model of the B11 submarine. Assistant curator Gordon Coulter and

committee members Phil Downs and Ian Gilbert were responsible for the excellent presentation. Mrs Holbrook, now 95 years old and living in Austria, could not attend the opening of the Hologram Exhibition because of ill health, but she was represented by Jane Waters and Jenny Farrell, whose association with her spans 29 years.

In 1980 Jenny and Jane went to Europe for an adventure. They had an introduction to Mrs Holbrook and hoped to be employed by the family, Jenny as a nurse and Jane as a cook. They were employed immediately and thoroughly enjoyed their time, becoming firm friends. Mrs Holbrook came to Australia in 1982 for Jenny's wedding, in 1984 for Jane's wedding, and has been back again eight more times. Each time she has visited Holbrook and bought souvenirs from the museum and multiple copies of Lawrence Ryan's book *Holbrook: the submarine town* to send to friends and relatives all over the world. Gundula Holbrook has survived her husband more than 30 years. Without her enthusiasm and generosity the connection to Commander Holbrook would have been academic—an historical link. But with her involvement the story has come to life and still evolves. In her reply to the invitation to attend the hologram opening, she wrote:

The honour you have bestowed on me asking me to officially open the Hologram, I had to decline with a very sad heart and great unhappiness because of illness and age. But believe me my spirit and my love for you all will be with you on this important day. You are Australia's Submarine town, a title to be proud of and Australia's submariners have also every right to be proud of your town. But, please, always remember the gallant young British Submarine Officer, whose name you chose to give your town.

Mrs Holbrook is the greatest ambassador Holbrook could ever wish for. Her love of the town and the far-sightedness of the committee who thought to acquire the *Otway* have seen the development of Holbrook from a small country town to a thriving tourist destination still forging ahead today. I congratulate those involved in creating the fascinating submarine museum and recommend a visit by all travellers along the Hume Highway.

ROCKDALE ELECTORATE COMMUNITY CONSULTATION

Mr FRANK SARTOR (Rockdale) [5.37 p.m.]: On 19 October 2009 I held a public meeting at Tempe House, Wolli Creek, for the residents of the area. I thank all those who attended the meeting, as well as Councillor Bill Saravinovski, the Deputy Mayor of Rockdale City Council, for his support and attendance. He is a terrific and tireless local representative. I thank also the member of the Arncliffe Branch of the Labor Party who attended the meeting. They are great advocates for the local community. Wolli Creek is a major rail junction at the intersection of the Illawarra line, the East Hills line and the airport rail link. Much of the area is under redevelopment as part of the Discovery Point project, which is only half completed, having stalled with the property market downturn in 2004.

Over the past couple of years there has been a steady stream of issues concerning residents of Wolli Creek and Arncliffe. In order to keep abreast of those issues, I decided to organise a public meeting to listen to what residents had to say. A number of State and local issues arose at the meeting. Of particular concern to many residents were the amenities of the Wolli Creek precinct. Questions were raised on the responsibility and costs of maintaining the public park around Tempe House and the future use of Tempe House and St Magdalene's Chapel. Both are listed historic buildings that have been restored recently. They are of significant importance to the area. Unfortunately, both are currently underutilised.

The deputy mayor suggested that Rockdale council look into the possibility of converting Tempe House into a library. Residents were very supportive of this idea. I also believe that it has some merit and asked that council investigate Councillor Saravinovski's idea. I will also be approaching the Historic Houses Trust to try to organise an advisory meeting with the representatives of both bodies corporate to look at the future of these two heritage buildings.

Another issue raised is the lighting in the Wolli Creek precinct. Residents are concerned that lights are not working and that some light poles have been removed, while others were never installed. I am advised that council has agreed to conduct a lighting audit of the area. Residents also raised concerns about the proposed town park at the corner of Guess Avenue and Arncliffe Street, Wolli Creek. The proposed site for the town park consists of two parcels of land. One is owned by the Department of Environment, Climate Change and Water and the other by Nippon Truck Spares. Both properties are zoned open space. Negotiations between council and the owners have stalled after failing to come to an agreement on price. I urge council to resume negotiations and acquire both parcels of land as soon as possible. I also urge the Minister for Water to see whether acquisition of the site owned by the State can be facilitated or even assisted.

Another pressing issue that was discussed was the need for a commuter car park near Wolli Creek railway station. As I said, this is a major rail junction. Although I understand this may be difficult because such

a facility was not part of the Wolli Creek master plan, I believe it is essential for the area. I have raised the issue with the Minister for Transport and in the House, and I do so again. Residents also requested additional train stops at Arncliffe station between 6.00 p.m. and 6.40 p.m. Of concern was the increase in hoon and antisocial behaviour in Wolli Creek, particularly in Ann Street. Hoons and associated serious antisocial behaviour have plagued the Rockdale electorate for a number of years, particularly along the Botany Bay foreshore, but this new development is of concern. I will be raising the matter with the Minister for Police and seeking his support for police resources to combat this undesirable behaviour. I will also be raising the matter with the local area commander.

In addition, residents have called for some traffic calming devices along Brodie Sparks Drive and Arncliffe Street due to speeding cars and other hoon behaviour. I understand council has applied for funding through the Federal Government's Nation Building Program black spot project and the Roads and Traffic Authority. I will be raising the matter with the Federal Attorney-General and member for Barton, the Hon. Robert McClelland, and with the Minister for Roads. Moreover, residents have asked that council consider a footbridge across the Cooks River linking Wolli Creek station and Tempe station. The Mayor of Rockdale, Councillor Shaoquett Moselmane, has also proposed this idea and I am fully supportive.

A bridge crossing could provide a direct pedestrian/cyclist link between the two stations, using Waterworth Park and Bayview Avenue. I ask that council establish a scope of works and raise the matter with Canterbury City Council to see if it can be jointly funded. These are important issues because the suburb of Wolli Creek will now be fully developed as the property market picks up and more residents start moving in. It is quite an interesting and diverse community and some of these outstanding issues need to be addressed. I thank the council for their assistance and cooperation and I will be seeking assistance from relevant Ministers.

ORANGE WINE WEEK

Mr RUSSELL TURNER (Orange) [5.42 p.m.]: It is a pleasure to speak briefly about Wine Week, which has just finished in Orange after 10 days of great celebrations. I will quote from the *Central Western Daily* of Friday 16 October, which stated:

The people of Orange will spend this evening swirling, sipping and spitting their way through over 200 of the region's finest drops to celebrate the launch of the 2009 Orange Wine Week.

Hundreds are expected to descend on the Orange Showground to partake in the food, wine and cultural extravaganza that is the Impresstick Orange Wine Show public tasting.

The public tasting is the first of nearly 100 events scheduled for the next seven days as wine fanatics set about sampling the liquid delights of the Orange vignerons' industry.

Orange Wine Week president Charlotte Gundry said the public tasting was a chance for people to taste wine grown in the city's own backyard.

"Over the last couple of years we've really tried to get the whole community to embrace what we're doing and feel a part of it, that's what this event is really about," she said.

As mentioned, there were over 100 events. The Wine Show was one such event. Orange vignerons did very well at that show and again highlighted the great sauvignon blancs that are coming from Orange, as well as the cab savs and the rosés. A few of the wineries are even producing sparkling wines. Whilst our pinot was criticised a little at the Wine Show and some of those producing pinot were put on notice, the potential for that variety of wine is fantastic. I thank some of the pioneers of the wine industry in Orange who went there some years ago when it was not as fashionable as it is today. We have all heard of Mudgee wines and to a lesser extent the wines grown around Cowra and Canowindra.

Orange is becoming increasingly important, not only for its wines but also for the grapes, which are sold to other winegrowers, whether it be in South Australia, the Hunter Valley or even Victoria. They are very highly sought after because of the cold climate and the flavour in the grapes. I mention especially Murray Smith from Canobolas Smith, and Rhonda and Stephen Doyle from Bloodwood, who are some of the pioneers who came to Orange many years ago. I would also like to mention Phillip Shaw, who was connected to Rosemount, which was one of the first vineyards in the area. Phillip Shaw has now gone out on his own and has his own vineyard and cellar door sales.

I mention also Jarretts, Mayfield, Angullong, Belgravia, Brangayne and Printhie. They are just a few, and there are many others who are playing their part in making Orange increasingly a part of the wine industry

and the food industry. It is interesting that a few years ago if you got into a cab in Sydney and asked the driver whether he had been to Orange he would say, "Oh, yes. That's on the way to Dubbo Zoo" or "That's near Bathurst and the car races." Now if you ask whether they have been to Orange they know that Orange has great wines and food. That is partly due to the fact that a sample of Orange's food and wine is put on show at Bondi each year. People are slowly realising the opportunities that exist around Orange and how worthwhile it can be.

I will briefly get onto my bandwagon about building a new highway over the mountains. If we can get a new highway it will not only be a safer and quicker route, but also it will break down the perception of distance. Many people who live west of Parramatta have a reasonable amount of money to spend socially. They think nothing of going to the Hunter Valley for the day or for the weekend. However, they would not think of going to Orange, Mudgee or Cowra because their perception is they are way out the other side of Dubbo and might as well be near Bourke, that they are too far away. A modern highway will help the wine and food industries that are growing in those three areas. I congratulate again all those who worked to make Wine Week such a success. I thank the committee for their voluntary work that ensures Wine Week is a success.

PORT KEMBLA MARITIME CENTRE

Ms NOREEN HAY (Wollongong) [5.47 p.m.]: I am pleased to inform the House of a wonderful event that occurred on a gloriously sunny day in my electorate of Wollongong. On Saturday 24 October 2009 the Port Kembla Maritime Centre was officially opened by Premier Nathan Rees. As usual, whenever there is a function and visitors come to Wollongong, the sun shines and it is glorious and the view is second to none. Hundreds of people were in attendance. Locals, such as the Mission to Seafarers, put on buses to move people from the car park so that aged, frail and disabled people could get access to the waterfront without distress. The centre is a landmark building reflecting the current development and innovation taking place at Port Kembla. The centre brings various port-related agencies together under one roof in a new state-of-the-art facility.

I acknowledge that the Minister for Ports and Waterways, Mr Tripodi, has done great work in relation to the port of Port Kembla. He comes down often, usually bearing gifts—thank goodness—to ensure that the port gets more and more trade. On the day the Minister for Ports and Waterways attended the opening of the Port Kembla Maritime Centre with the Minister for Transport, and Minister for the Illawarra, David Campbell. Hundreds of people turned up to participate in events and jumping castles were provided for the children. As I said, it was a wonderful family day.

As well as providing the headquarters for the Port Kembla Port Corporation, other tenants include NSW Maritime, the New South Wales Water Police Force, and the Australian Quarantine and Inspection Service. This is not just another government building; it is a community building. On the day the community revealed that it wanted to be part of this centre, and it was part of it. The services housed in the building are for the use of the community, to assist the future growth of the port and to maintain the Illawarra's strong maritime history.

Richard Davis performed the welcome to country ceremony in front of hundreds of locals who attended, as well as the Minister for Ports and Waterways, the Minister for the Illawarra, the member for Kiama, and the Chair of the Port Corporation, Nick Whitlam. To reinforce the community message and to celebrate the opening of this wonderful building, a Maritime Community Day was organised by the hardworking staff of the Port Kembla Port Corporation, in particular, Sandy Rae and Sally Hall, under the ever-watchful eye of its Chief Executive Officer, Dom Figliomeni. Local community groups, service clubs and government agencies joined together to showcase what Port Kembla had to offer.

I acknowledge and thank Australian Customs and Border Protection, the Australian Hydrographic Service, Australian Seabird Rescue, the Lake Illawarra Volunteer Coast Guard, the Australian Maritime Safety Authority, volunteers and friends of the Breakwater Battery Museum, Port Kembla Surf Life Saving Club—in particular, for its outstanding and plentiful free sausage sizzle for the community—Svitzer, and the rotary clubs of Corrimal and Bulli. I thank the Port Kembla Maritime Area Command for giving community members an opportunity to see firsthand the *Nemesis*, the largest purpose-built police boat in the Southern Hemisphere, and the pride of the fleet of the Marine Area Command.

Members of the Wollongong Local Area Command and the Lake Illawarra Local Area Command who were in attendance were proud of the police resources and facilities that were displayed for the benefit of the community. Members would be aware that I always advocate for and highlight the positives of the Illawarra and, in particular, Wollongong, the electorate I am privileged to serve. The spirit of community at the

community fund day, which was evident amongst locals and visitors alike, reinforced for me the wonderful place in which I live and the wonderful community I represent. I have said on at least 100 occasions in this House that Wollongong, the number one electorate in New South Wales, is second to none.

The New South Wales Government continues to invest in Wollongong. We are grateful for the jobs, the industry that has been created, and the car imports that that industry has generated. We are also grateful for the showground grandstand and for investment in the hospital. This Government has invested across the board in my electorate. I am proud to be a Labor member of Parliament representing the Wollongong electorate. I invite everyone to visit Wollongong and to see what a wonderful place it is.

Ms SONIA HORNERY (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.52 p.m.]: I am pleased that the sun was shining on Saturday 24 October for the member for Wollongong and her constituents. It sounds as though it was a wonderful day. I am pleased that the Port Kembla Maritime Centre—a landmark building—was opened. I congratulate the member for Wollongong, who I am sure worked hard to earn this wonderful state-of-the-art and landmark building.

WAGGA WAGGA BASE HOSPITAL

Mr DARYL MAGUIRE (Wagga Wagga) [5.53 p.m.]: A crisis is developing at Wagga Wagga Base Hospital. In fact, I am sure that some community members would suggest that this crisis—the reduction in obstetric services—has been developing over a period. Wagga Wagga Base Hospital, a major referral hospital, delivers babies from the Riverina and south-west slopes area. In addition, it takes in referrals and deals with virtually every type of medical emergency. However, its obstetrics service is in crisis. Recent media reports have suggested that Wagga Wagga is to lose Dr Shelby Jarrell, who has been working at Wagga Wagga Base Hospital for some time.

Dr Jarrell is to be replaced by obstetrics and gynaecology services that will be staffed by specialists from a private company to tackle the staff shortages. Dr Joe McGirr, an executive from the Greater Southern Area Health Service, admitted that recruitment attempts had been inadequate and he said that the services would be provided through Aspen Medical. I ask the Minister and the Greater Southern Area Health Service: Why have the recruitments been inadequate? What has gone wrong? Dr McGirr admitted that past attempts to recruit obstetricians had failed. He said:

Sometimes our recruitment efforts haven't been the greatest, but we are learning.

Expectant mothers, who deserve the best service, have no guarantee that they will see the same specialist at each appointment in the lead-up to the birth of their babies—a problem that must be rectified. The headline on the front page of today's *Daily Advertiser* is "Baby Blues". Dr Peter Mourik, a doctor from Albury, suggested that the health services should be taken over by the Federal Government. He said:

This isn't something that happened overnight. The women of Wagga should be getting together to demand attention to these issues and it needs to go to the Federal Government.

It is a national emergency. Greater Southern has totally failed the public along with NSW Health and Wagga provides critical services to a vast area of NSW.

All sorts of claims have been made, but Dr McGirr said that negative media attention and a shortage of specialists were partly the reason for the inability of area health services to attract obstetric staff. I referred today in this House to the lack of adequate infrastructure to help attract medical physicians. The Minister, and not departmental bureaucrats, must solve this problem through a hands-on approach. Obstetric services must not be interrupted because of inadequate management. From time to time there are staffing difficulties, but we want a concentrated effort by the Minister to address the shortcomings in the system. If the process has failed it must be fixed. Expectant mothers deserve a permanent solution to this problem.

If a private company can supply the Greater Southern Area Health Service with obstetricians and gynaecologists, why can the area health service not do the same? Why is NSW Health not able to attract obstetricians to Wagga Wagga and to other places—obstetricians who want to work in these area health services? That is the question the Minister should be asking her bureaucrats as she steers this area health service out of its problems and delivers permanent obstetric services to Wagga Wagga and the region. In the coming weeks and months members will be hearing more about this issue. I have been told that the changeover will

occur in October. I want to see a solution to this problem. I want to know from the Minister what incentives have been offered. Why was there a failure in the recruitment system? The public and, in particular, expectant mothers deserve an explanation.

NEWCASTLE RATING SYSTEM

Ms SONIA HORNER (Wallsend—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.58 p.m.]: When councillors in Newcastle City Council debated the 2009-10 budget, Labor representatives and the Greens councillor supported an ad valorem rating system as opposed to a high base rate. With the defeat of the ad valorem rating system the debate moved quickly to what percentage the base rate should incur. The majority of councillors in Newcastle City Council then voted diabolically to double the base rate to 50 per cent on the basis that it was more equitable. When councillors in Newcastle City Council made that decision they transferred the wealth from the poorer suburbs, which have fewer facilities, and increased the wealth of the well-served inner-city and beach suburbs. By definition, that was regressive.

The vexing question is how land values, and thus ad valorem, are determined. A major consideration is location. Consequently, the beautiful beachside suburbs attract higher land values. Residents of the inner city listen to the surf swirling at their front door and smell the salty air, while their western counterparts listen to the traffic and smell the sweet air emanating from the Summerhill Waste Management Centre at their back door. We are told, of course, that both areas offer the same quality of life. Returning to the problem with land rates, what did the western ratepayers receive for paying higher rates? Nothing. Ratepayers in the poorer suburbs then got a further slap in the face. Councillors elected to spend \$13.5 million on the inner city and only \$7.4 million on the rest of the local government area—not quite double, but members get the idea.

The Blue Gum Hills precinct comprising Maryland, Fletcher, Nikkinba Ridge, Highland County and Minmi contains the outermost suburbs of the local government area and is one of the biggest growth areas in Newcastle. New developments are attracting young families to settle in the new estates, creating new communities and helping the Newcastle local government area to prosper and grow. The ambitions of Blue Gum Hills families are modest. They do not ask for large edifices, great monuments or post-modern sculptures. All they want is a decent park for their children to play in safely and a paved footpath to walk along. One may think they are reasonable requests—nothing too flashy or, for that matter, too expensive in the scheme of things. On the basis of "equity", rates were increased for Blue Gum Hills families. How much was allocated to new infrastructure? In the western region, the 10,000 residents received nothing—not one cent. Meanwhile, in town the Newcastle City Council has spent \$30,000 to assess whether to shine beams of light over the harbour—I kid you not!

The suburb of Wallsend was allocated \$5.5 million by Newcastle City Council. On the surface that appears to be reasonably generous, but on closer examination we learn that \$4 million of that allocation is to extend the Summerhill Waste Management Centre. That is hardly beneficial in improving the lifestyle of Blue Gum Hills residents. I am confident that the Ward 4 Labor Councillor, who is a local and represents the west of the city, is doing his best to protect and promote the area. It is not easy to get Newcastle City Council to look west—I know this from personal experience as a councillor. Lord Mayor John Tate has been quoted as saying, "Money was allocated on a needs basis. The location doesn't matter as long as it's in the LGA."

Residents of the western suburbs would like to take the lord mayor up on his offer and build the shared cycle and pedestrian paths that are so desperately required to connect the Blue Gum Hills villages with Wallsend. Let us use the money to extend the dual lanes at Blue Gum Hills past the waste management centre through to Minmi. Let us build the promised sporting fields. Let us heat Wallsend pool. I extend an open invitation to the mayor and the many councillors who live in the city and along the beach to visit their western constituents and listen to their concerns. I offer my support to Newcastle city councillors and council officers and reaffirm that the door of my electorate office in Wallsend is always open to them.

SOUTHERN REGION COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Ms PRU GOWARD (Goulburn) [6.03 p.m.]: Education providers come in many shapes and sizes. Schools, TAFE colleges and universities tend to spring instantly to mind, but there are other, perhaps lesser-known providers, and today I refer to one in the Goulburn electorate. The Southern Region Community College has been in the business of education for more than 30 years. During that time it has offered courses that range from vocational, such as business administration and computer courses, to recreational, such as learning French or Italian or even belly dancing. Enrolments at the college average around 1,000 students a year from

across the electorate. Courses are held at various times during the day and evening to enable access flexibility. The age of students reaches across decades from 17 to 65 years—education for all! What a great idea, and surely one that is championed by the New South Wales Labor Government.

Unfortunately not, as Goulburn discovered recently when we learnt that the Southern Region Community College will close its doors at the end of 2009—a victim of insufficient funding. For a number of years community colleges in New South Wales have lobbied the Government to provide three-year funding contracts, in much the same way as happens with many other providers. The Government's response was to ignore those pleas and continue with 12-month contracts, a curse to forward planning and organising. Despite increased enrolments in some courses and the hard work and dedication of executive officers Helen Benton, Penny Schwarz and Robyn Provino, not to mention dozens of teachers, the college doors will close for the last time at the end of the year.

I wonder whether the Minister for Education and Training, who is in the Chamber, will visit Goulburn and explain to the wheelchair-bound students who cannot access other training providers with ease that their courses will have to stop at the end of this year. Will the Minister be able to explain that, despite all the efforts by the college to be more accessible through flexibility and pay-as-you-go options to lift the burden of financial strain from students, their education options will end at the end of term four? The 65-year-old country gentleman who has finally taken the bull by the horns and enrolled in a literacy program to learn to read and write will be lucky to get past the alphabet. I only hope he is determined enough—and financially able—to pursue his dream some other way.

The truth about community colleges is that, as the name suggests, they play an integral role in the community. They encourage learning in an atmosphere that is not confronting. Because of that, they attract students who might otherwise never learn to read and write, operate a computer, take on that business administration course, complete a first-aid course, or learn how to take a photograph. Can we really be so negligent of a service that offers so much to communities that are becoming increasingly fragmented, with some being left behind? Generations have struggled constantly to bridge the gap between the ages, but perhaps never more so than now in this age of the Internet, email, Facebook and even Twitter.

Keeping up with the Kids/Grandkids is an innovative course offered by the college that helps older men and women come to grips with new technology. Helen Benton told me of two senior men whose children were moving overseas to live. Before they left they each bought their father a laptop computer with the request that they enrol at the community college and learn how to use email. The non-threatening environment supported these men while they became email wizards. At the end of the course they marvelled at how their world had opened up, allowing them to have regular contact with their children and families.

In recent years—and in true community style—the Southern Region Community College has supported the founding of the Goulburn Men's Shed. Earlier this year, rather than continuing under the auspice of the college, Helen Benton—who could see the writing on the wall and who had already taken to cleaning the college premises in the evening to save money—encouraged the men's shed to become incorporated. That encouragement was its saving grace—otherwise, it too would have become a victim of financial deprivation. Several men who joined the Goulburn Men's Shed have told Helen that this interest actually saved their lives. Community involvement can change lives. If the Southern Region Community College closes its doors, it will leave a huge gap in the lifelong learning opportunities offered to communities from Yass to Campbelltown, and particularly of course the city of Goulburn. There is nothing in between. Nine other colleges across New South Wales have closed in the past 12 months, all for the same reason. I take this opportunity to ask the Minister for Education and Training to help stop the Southern Region Community College becoming yet another statistic.

YARINGAA DEMENTIA DAY CARE CENTRE

Ms MARIE ANDREWS (Gosford) [6.08 p.m.]: It is generally agreed that Australia has an ageing population. Nowhere is that more evident than in my electorate of Gosford. The Gosford electorate is rated sixth in New South Wales, with the proportion of people aged over 65 years at 19.51 per cent. On the Woy Woy peninsula the concentration of older people is up to 9 per cent greater than that in the entire population of Gosford city. It is a challenge for governments to cater for this ageing population. This will be more evident in the future, as the baby boomers reach retirement age. The Rees Labor Government has accepted the challenge and is investing in services for the aged. On 28 September 2009 I was pleased to welcome to the Gosford electorate the Minister for Ageing and Disability Services, the Hon. Paul Lynch, for the official opening of a new dementia day care centre in Woy Woy, called Yaringaa.

Yaringaa is an Aboriginal word from the Darkinyung language meaning "place of laughter", which I believe is most befitting in this context. Yaringaa combines three services—Community Care Services Central Coast, the Peninsula Community Centre and Gosford City Food Services—in one building to offer a venue for dementia day care, case management services and Meals on Wheels. The \$1.65 million centre was jointly funded by the Australian and New South Wales governments under the Home and Community Care Program, with Gosford City Council contributing to the land and building. The State Government contributed \$650,000 towards meeting the cost of the building.

The New South Wales Department of Ageing and Disability Services also financially assists local service providers on a recurrent basis. The Government provides recurrent funds of more than \$337,000 to Community Care Services Central Coast to provide dementia-specific, centre-based day care, and has provided \$51,000 for transport. The Peninsula Community Centre also receives recurrent funding of \$1.15 million to provide case management services, and Gosford City Food Services received \$481,000 to provide Meals on Wheels throughout the Gosford local government area.

The new Yaringaa centre involved the incorporation of a purpose-designed day care facility, the provision of office and meeting room areas, and the modernisation of the Meals on Wheels facility. The Yaringaa centre is the second of a total of 16 centres to be completed across the State. These centres provide outings, day trips, support, nursing, and allied health services to people with dementia and their carers. The provision of local services is critical to the community because it allows people to live in their own homes for as long as possible. Without Home and Community Care services, many people would have to move prematurely into residential care.

According to Alzheimer's Australia—whose current New South Wales chief executive officer is the former Deputy Premier of New South Wales, the Hon. John Watkins—in 2008 there were 227,300 people with dementia. This number is expected to grow, with an estimated 57,000 new cases expected in that year alone. Alzheimer's Australia speaks of the "dementia tsunami". It states that, according to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the number of deaths from dementia has more than doubled in the past decade, and dementia is now the fourth-highest cause of death in Australia.

Dementia is not just a disease of older Australians; it can also affect younger people. Currently more than 9,600 Australians under the age of 65 are living with younger onset dementia. Alzheimer's Australia also notes that around half of the people with moderate to severe dementia live in the community either in their own homes or in the home of their carers. It is these statistics, along with community concerns, that have prompted all three levels of government to come together on this occasion to provide this much-needed centre. The new centre will help to meet the ever-increasing demand for these services on the Woy Woy peninsula. I acknowledge all those involved in the running of programs at the Yaringaa centre. They do a remarkable job and are supported by a wonderful band of volunteers.

Funding from the State Labor Government for the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care has increased dramatically in the past four to five years. In the 2009-10 budget the Government has allocated \$2.26 billion to the Department of Ageing, Disability and Home Care, which is an increase of 11.8 per cent over the previous year. Over the past five years the budget for ageing and disability services has increased by a staggering \$713.4 million, or 46 per cent. Spending on Home and Community Care services has also increased, mainly in response to an ageing population. On the Central Coast \$29.9 million will be spent this financial year on Home and Community Care services to assist frail older people to live independently in their communities.

ROXY CAFÉ, BINGARA

Mr RICHARD TORBAY (Northern Tablelands—Speaker) [6.13 p.m.]: One of the most pleasing results from the recent rich array of Federal infrastructure funding initiatives for the regions is the \$750,000 announced last week for the restoration of the old Roxy Café in Bingara. I must confess a special interest in this project, as it reflects an aspect of Australia's successful migrant history with which I am very familiar. The café was built at the height of the Great Depression, in 1935-36. It was the restaurant attached to the new Roxy Theatre, which seated more than 470 people and was the second cinema to open in the small country town. The art deco theatre also doubled as a dance venue and the café, with its spectacular 32-foot counter, was the most modern restaurant in Bingara at the time.

Both the cinema and the café were built by a syndicate of three Greek migrant businessmen from the island of Kythera. At that time almost every country town in Australia had a Greek café or two, and they were

famous for introducing American-style meals such as hamburgers, milkshakes, ice cream sodas, sundaes and banana splits along with the ubiquitous mixed grill, for which they were most famous. Like the theatre, the Roxy Café was built on a grand scale. But after 1959 both fell on hard times and lost their original cachet, prestige and status.

In 1999 the then Bingara Shire Council purchased the theatre in order to restore and reopen it. The State Government contributed \$205,000 towards the project. By 2004 the building was returned to its former splendour and was officially opened by the Premier at the time, the Hon. Bob Carr. I was very pleased to attend the opening ceremony. At the opening, the Premier announced the allocation of a further \$40,000 to replace the original roof. Since that time the theatre has proved to be an outstanding success as a cinema and venue for live theatre and community events, attracting patrons from across the region.

More recently, the Gwydir Shire Council purchased the Roxy Café adjoining the old theatre. Although it retained some of the original kitchen fittings, it had been stripped of the art deco features that made it such a period piece. Last week's funding announcement was the culmination of a strong campaign by the Gwydir council and the Bingara community to restore the café and fit it out, keeping as closely as possible to its original design. Sandy McNaughton, the Roxy Theatre's dynamic manager, has put her heart and soul into this project. She has received strong support not only from the council and local community but also from the descendents of Greek migrants who pioneered the café culture in Australia. The majority of these cafés disappeared with the introduction of fast-food outlets and many of those that remained were modernised by developers, particularly during the 1960s.

Fortunately, Sandy tracked down the original art deco fittings and furniture from a Greek café that had been run for many years by the Fardouly family in Inverell. These will be installed in the new Roxy. In rooms above the café, which formerly accommodated staff, memorabilia and photographs recording Greek café culture in Australia will be displayed. There is now general recognition that this is an important part of our heritage. Already enormous interest in the Bingara project is being shown by the Greek community along the east coast. It is destined to become a major tourist attraction. The café will not be a museum. It will revert to its original use to cater for audiences and groups who use the theatre, and for community events. The Gwydir Shire Council, in conjunction with the Gwydir Learning Region, is also considering the incorporation of a Trade Training Centre for hospitality in the restored venue. The program will be run in collaboration with the New England Institute of TAFE, the University of New England, the Bingara Central School and the Warialda High School.

Many people still remember when local Greek cafés were the only places to eat out in our country towns. These cafés sprang up as migrants saw an opportunity to create businesses and to bring more of their family members to settle in Australia. In those days it was not so much about ethnic cuisine, as country tastes rarely ran to moussaka and other Greek dishes. My own family migrated from Lebanon and they too established cafés, milk bars and other businesses in Sydney and country New South Wales. They endured many hardships and were among the pioneers who introduced Australians to the enjoyment of Lebanese food. Along with migrants from many other nationalities, they helped to establish the extraordinary multiethnic food culture we enjoy today. The Roxy Café venture pays homage to that entrepreneurial spirit that grew from such humble beginnings to greatly enrich the Australian quality of life.

VEHICLE CHILD RESTRAINTS

Mrs DAWN FARDELL (Dubbo) [6.18 p.m.]: I draw to the attention of the House the necessity of changing current laws relating to vehicle child restraints. This issue is not being addressed with sufficient effort, and that is unnecessarily putting the lives of children in New South Wales in jeopardy each time they are driven in the family car. Unfortunately, the issue seems to be not widely understood by either the general public or the Government. It is not just babies and toddlers who require specialised vehicle restraints: the standard lap sash seatbelt is designed for adults and does not properly protect children. Research has demonstrated that children under the age of 12 are too small in stature to fit into an adult seatbelt. In an accident, ill-fitting seatbelts actually can cause, rather than prevent, injury or even death.

In this State, laws regarding properly fitted restraints apply only to babies up to the age of two years. In Queensland, Victoria, South Australia, Western Australia and the Australian Capital Territory, new rules have been introduced that make it compulsory for children up to the age of seven years to sit in vehicle booster seats. The addition of a properly fitted booster seat is a small and relatively inexpensive addition to the average family car. It will dramatically improve the fit and efficiency of standard seatbelts when used by children. Recent press

articles state that the New South Wales Minister for Roads is planning to introduce new rules soon. I urge the Minister to make haste with his plan. There are few more important issues for consideration in this House than those that affect the safety of our children.

The legislative change required to make booster seats compulsory for young children is not a difficult or complex task, yet it would make a dramatic difference in reducing death and injuries rates for children in road accidents. Sadly, the road statistics in my region have climbed dramatically this year. Inexplicably, road deaths for the year to date have almost doubled. One of the most recent horrific incidents saw the lives of the Salter family of Condobolin tragically cut short. Anita and Andrew Salter died in a rollover accident on the Narromine Road near Tullamore on Friday. Seemingly miraculously, their son, 11-month-old Henry, survived the crash. But it was not due to a miracle that baby Henry is alive today; his survival is due entirely to a properly fitted baby capsule in the rear of the family vehicle. Henry's life was saved by legislation that requires babies to be properly restrained when travelling in vehicles.

Had Henry been just a few years older at the time of this incident, the result may have been even more tragic for the Salter family, as children over the age of two are not properly protected by adult lap sash belts. Sadly, many parents may not be aware that even relatively minor collisions can prove fatal for children if they are wearing only an adult seatbelt, as the positioning of that belt and the current design of car seats can lead to devastating abdominal and spinal injuries. The best advice on child passenger safety also indicates that an easily attached harness-style seatbelt, where two straps come down over the shoulders of the child and attach to the adult lap sash, will give far better protection to a child than a single adult-style seatbelt that crosses over only one shoulder.

These types of restraints are readily available in large retail stores and shops that specialise in products for babies and small children. They are relatively inexpensive, selling generally for \$30 to \$50, which is much less than the cost of a plasma screen television, an iPod or many of the other gadgets in which families are prepared to invest. Perhaps once the Government has acted on the advice of the Prince of Wales Medical Research Institute, and approved by the Australian Transport Council in February last year, making it compulsory for children aged up to seven to use booster seats, there will be more consideration of making harness-style seatbelts compulsory also. This is not nanny state style intervention; what I am suggesting today are sensible safety adjustments that can be made cheaply and simply with readily available products already on the market that will save the lives of our children.

Let adults be frivolous with their safety, but with the care of our children let us not be so lax as to continue in this State with the current inadequate seatbelt laws for minors. I urge the Minister for Transport and the Minister for Roads to make these rule changes a key priority and to push the changes through before the end of this year. Let us not allow this unnecessary wait drag on when other States across Australia have already adopted these simple, life-saving changes.

Private members' statements concluded.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! Private members' statements having concluded, the House will now proceed to the matter of public importance.

BATTERY HENS

Matter of Public Importance

Ms CHERIE BURTON (Kogarah) [6.23 p.m.]: I ask the House to note as a matter of public importance a ban on battery hens. This Parliament has a proud history of legislating to prevent cruelty to animals. Thanks to the good conscience of this House, the following measures have been banned: tail docking of dogs, tethering of pigs, cock fighting and dog fighting, duck shooting, selling pound dogs for experimentation, force-feeding geese to produce pâté, coursing, bullfighting, and displaying live lobsters for consumption. I believe we have a historic opportunity to add to that list by banning the battery or cage system of egg production. This is truly an idea whose time has come. It is a form of animal cruelty that cannot be justified in the twenty-first century. Banning eggs from caged hens makes both moral and financial sense. I will address the moral issue first.

Our tolerance of battery hens probably has much more to do with the fact that hens are seen as unintelligent animals. That view is contradicted by a range of international experts, including Dr Chris Evans,

Dr Lesley Rogers, Dr Joy Mench, Dr Christine Nicol and Dr Bernard Rollin. These distinguished animal behaviour scientists, and many more, have proven that the cognitive abilities of chickens are more advanced than those of cats, dogs and even some primates. Hens are highly social, intelligent and inquisitive birds. Caging hens is therefore a kind of living hell—a form of torture that if inflicted on humans would lead to a long prison sentence. Indeed, the living conditions inflicted on battery hens are totally illegal for companion animals. It is a form of institutionalised hypocrisy.

A cage is no place for these animals, and I ask members to consider the following facts. A hen with her wings outstretched is twice the length of a battery cage. In other words, each hen has only half the space she needs to stretch her wings, which is a normal part of avian behaviour. Cages make it impossible for hens to walk or otherwise exercise. In order to eat, confined hens push against the wire of their cages, which rubs their feathers off. These sore spots are pecked, ripped and easily infected. Hens' beaks are removed using a hot iron or infrared device in a procedure euphemistically called a "trim", a grotesque disfigurement of the bird. In a natural environment a hen's claws are worn down from walking, but battery hens never have this opportunity so their claws grow long.

Hens spend their entire existence trying to stabilise their footing on wire flooring. Because of a lack of exercise, a lack of sunshine and an overproduction of eggs, hens develop extremely brittle bones that break easily and frequently. Caging prevents hens from observing their natural social hierarchy. Confinement in a cage offers hens no way of escaping aggressive cage mates. Saddest perhaps are the circumstances in which hens are forced to lay their eggs. Chickens normally lay their eggs in a nest that is relatively private and sheltered, a deep natural instinct. In a cage that is simply not possible. Nobel Prize winner and animal behaviourist Professor Konrad Lorenz described the situation as follows:

The worst torture to which a caged hen is exposed is the inability to retire somewhere for the laying act.

For the person who knows something about animals it is truly heart-rending to watch how a chicken tries again and again to crawl beneath her fellow cage mates to search there in vain for cover.

A hen's desire to use a nest is so strong she would prefer to go without food or water than be without a nest.

It is true that early last year New South Wales introduced a minor increase in cage size for laying hens. Despite that move, caged hens still live in an area smaller than the size of an A4 piece of paper or six credit cards in a single row. By any definition, that is pitiful. There is no moral or ethical reason why an advanced, civilised nation such as Australia should tolerate such cruelty. Like tail docking or vivisection, caging hens for egg production has had its day. It is time to change. There are now viable alternatives that will ensure an adequate supply of eggs and enable providers to make a profit. There is a rapidly growing market for free-range eggs—a trend that is well and truly underway. Around one-third of the eggs sold in New South Wales are free range, although there are admittedly some problems with definitions and compliance.

Certainly, a large and growing section of the egg industry is free range, which means we have the knowledge base to rapidly grow the industry. Already, large organisations such as McDonald's, the University of Newcastle and Melbourne University are moving completely away from using eggs from caged birds. In fact, McDonald's buys 70 million eggs a year, and its move to non-caged sources will be a huge stimulus to the free-range industry. The greater the amount of free-range production the greater the economy of scale, ensuring that prices will fall. Banning caged egg production will not be a novelty—far from it. In fact, our colleagues in Europe and the United States of America are well ahead of us. In January 1999 the European Union voted to ban the battery cage system of eggs. Countries were given 13 years notice: all cages will be banned by 2012.

In November last year Californians voted overwhelmingly to ban the battery cage system. This ban will come into effect on 1 January 2015, giving egg producers seven years to change their system. In New South Wales progress is underway. Randwick, Marrickville, City of Sydney and North Sydney councils have all voted to go cage free. It is time to extend that humane approach to the whole State. There will be opposition to such a move, and the Australian Egg Corporation will be in the vanguard of that opposition. I do not want to pick a fight with any industry lobby, but it is fair to say there will always be alarmism and exaggeration from vested interest groups when reform is being proposed. We saw it with tort law reform, workers compensation and marine parks, and we will see it from battery hen producers as well.

The Australian Egg Corporation gives the game away in its latest annual report. There is not a single photograph of caged battery hens but plenty of happy images of free-range hens moving about freely. I have no

doubt that there will be additional costs but a few extra cents for a carton of eggs is a small price to pay to stop millions of animals being tortured every year in our State, a State that prides itself on its progressive approach to animal welfare.

Mr RUSSELL TURNER (Orange) [6.30 p.m.]: I was formerly an egg producer, as most members know, and I will speak briefly on battery hens. The Minister for Community Services made some very emotional comments and mentioned that Marrickville and Randwick councils have banned cages. One wonders how many cages are in those municipal areas, and in the electorate of Kogarah. The Minister referred to the cruelty of hens not being allowed to do what is natural to them, but how many cats and dogs in her electorate are kept in little apartments with only five or ten minutes walk each afternoon? We do not live in an ideal world. The Minister also said some 30 per cent of eggs sold are from free-range hens—a figure that has been thrown around—but the figures from the industry show that only about 10 per cent of birds in commercial lay today are classified as free range, barnyard, vegetarian, open range et cetera. If 30 per cent of the sales are free range or barnyard but the industry acknowledges only 10 per cent of the birds are free range, there must be a lot of dubious classifications of eggs.

The Minister said that free-range eggs cost a few extra cents, but it is closer to \$1 per dozen extra to produce from free-range, barnyard et cetera. I have produced barnyard, vegetarian eggs but I was forced into producing what my customers wanted. The retailers stocked free-range eggs if their customers asked them to. Customers demonstrate whether they are prepared to pay extra for free-range, barnyard eggs instead of eggs from caged layers. These days a carton of eggs must have printed on it if the eggs have come from caged animals, so people have a choice. People are under pressure in relation to grocery prices and most people just want a dozen quality eggs at a reasonable price. Yes, some people travel 50 to 100 kilometres to buy a dozen free-range eggs, which is a choice they have had for many years.

The Minister mentioned that under the latest regulations cages have got a little bigger and are of better design. When I had birds the cages had a lift-up door but now they have sliding doors so it is easier to get the birds in and out, so how much cruelty is involved? When I first went into egg production the birds were housed in very basic sheds, sometimes with no walls and temperature control and very little feed control. But now they are much better and some have evaporative coolers to maintain the temperature. When I started as a producer a commercial bird laid about 160 eggs a year. Today, because of better genetics, better housing and better cages birds lay about 310 eggs a year. How much cruelty are they subjected to when their production has increased? Caged birds have a far lower mortality than free-range or barnyard birds.

Free-range signs can be seen on the side of the road in the outer areas of Sydney and all over New South Wales but there is no quality standard in relation to those eggs. Customers do not know how old they are or whether they have been fertilised. In winter the hens walk about in mud and their own manure. Most times they are not in as good condition as birds in cages, all housed in an environmentally controlled environment. If cages are banned and consumers are forced into buying free-range eggs—people keep referring to the European Union, which has mandated the time when it will go to barnyard and free range—we will be faced with a flood of imports of cheap eggs from caged birds in countries outside the European Union, for example, from North Africa. Many years ago the poultry industry in Switzerland was decimated when that country banned cages and cheap eggs from caged birds came into Switzerland and the free-range and barnyard producers could not compete.

At the moment we have excellent quality control for the hens. Cages have to be a certain size, there has to be a certain amount of food and water and the birds are very well looked after. Do we want cheap eggs from overseas countries that have been produced with no quality control or do we want to maintain a very healthy industry that employs a lot of people? Let the customers make up their mind. If all of a sudden 80 per cent of people want eggs from free-range birds, the industry will respond and supply them. A couple of weeks ago when the member for Sydney spoke on this subject I mentioned that a man in Young was putting in a huge free-range complex because his customers asked him to supply them with free-range eggs. Council made it very difficult for him and put 82 conditions on the development. The Minister for Community Services mentioned councils that will ban cages. One would think the council at Young would have welcomed that development with open arms and done everything possible to encourage him rather than to make it as difficult as possible.

Customers can decide whether they want to pay an extra \$1 a dozen for free-range eggs—good on them. It is one thing for McDonald's to issue a press release in the paper to say it will encourage and get free-range eggs but I know that when I supplied McDonald's it did not want to pay any more than it had to. If free-range eggs will cost an extra \$1 a dozen, I doubt that McDonald's will go to free range, as has been suggested. We want the public to make up their mind on this matter.

Ms NOREEN HAY (Wollongong) [6.37 p.m.]: I am concerned about the comments of the member for Orange. I remind all members that free range was first. The member referred to customer demands but he was talking about multinationals that want to buy eggs as cheaply as possible. Similarly, we have talked to meat producers who are required to put in certain amounts of colouring and give antibiotics to animals et cetera, but I think if it is cruel the practice has to stop. If a customer says, "Wring their neck a bit more and squish them in a bit more and they might produce another two eggs", when does that stop? I, for one, have for years been purchasing free-range eggs only. I would never let one of my four adult children or five grandchildren eat eggs delivered by hens that had been treated cruelly. I am an animal lover. Why are stock animals exempt from laws that protect companion animals when they have exactly the same ability to feel pain, stress, fear and pleasure? I ask all members of this House to consider that question.

I know people who are customers of multinationals such as Woolworths and Coles who have not asked for their food to be irradiated or frozen but that is how their food comes whether they like it or not. As the Minister for Community Services said, the Australian Labor Party has a history of passing progressive legislation to prevent cruelty to animals. In this day and age when we are constantly flooded with news and information in all mediums there is no excuse for ignorance when it comes to cruelty to animals. I am sure that if a picture of what happens to those hens were placed near the cartons of eggs available for sale people would reconsider and that \$1 would seem very little indeed. I am very passionate about banning the current caged egg system. My family have been purchasing free-range eggs for years. I abhor and see no reason for the caged system to exist at all. Arguments can be, and have been, put forward as to why banning this system is not possible.

Similarly, such arguments were presented by vested interest groups such as breeders and some veterinarians in the lead-up to a ban on the docking of dogs' tails. There have always been individuals and groups that have no compunction about putting profit before ethics. In the early nineteenth century slavery was a worldwide social and economic institution. Human beings were bought and sold and kept in horrendous conditions. Yet in the twenty-first century the same forms of cruelty and torture are perpetuated, albeit on defenceless animals. Organisations that work tirelessly to raise issues that are confronting animals that have no way of defending themselves force us, as responsible members of society, to look at the choices we make relating to animals.

The member for Orange said that people who do not want to purchase eggs that have come from caged chickens do not have to. If there were no market for eggs from caged birds that would bring about a stop to the caging of chooks. I am an animal lover. I have two Great Dane puppies, both the size of a small horse, and have always had domestic pets. They are in my yard and in my home. They are shut in the house with me. They are loved, cuddled, kissed, fed, looked after and kept warm. They are in no fear of danger. I am sure that if the chicks were taken out of cages and looked after they would show appreciation too.

The member for Kogarah detailed the appalling conditions that caged chickens are forced to endure, and that made me frustrated and sad. I am frustrated that those who farm those chickens, with their beaks trimmed and stuffed into cages no bigger than an A4 piece of paper, first, have the hide to call themselves farmers; and, secondly, condone that treatment of animals and see nothing wrong with it. It is sad that this barbaric treatment is happening today to those highly social, intelligent and inquisitive birds that deserve more and need us to give it to them. It is with some disappointment that I note that other governments have refused to endorse the Eggs (Cage Systems) Legislation Amendment Bill 2009. However, one small consolation was that marketing requirements were modified and the Australian Capital Territory Government offered its support for improved retail signage. I abhor the caging of chickens and call on the people of New South Wales not to purchase eggs that are delivered from caged chooks.

Ms CHERIE BURTON (Kogarah) [6.42 p.m.], in reply: I thank the member for Orange and the member for Wollongong for their contributions to this debate, which covered both sides of the argument. I agree with the member for Orange on certain matters in that the freeing of caged chickens has a long row to hoe and many difficulties to overcome. As the member for Wollongong said, the campaign has to start somewhere. Tonight in this House the member for Wollongong and I have, hopefully, started that campaign. As has been said, legislation to ban the caging of chickens has been knocked back in other jurisdictions. That is why I believe that it needs to be a national approach, perhaps through the Council of Australian Governments, where all States and Territories are asked to ban simultaneously the caging of chickens.

Inherently, there are a lot of issues concerning imports but, once again, we need to make sure that consumers are advised not to buy eggs from caged birds. I have listened to all the economic arguments and all

the arguments against free-range farming, but nothing is more important to me and nothing can justify the abject cruelty faced by those chickens. When chickens have their beaks burnt off they are in excruciating pain and they are given no pain relief. They are left in their cages. When that is stacked up against paying an extra dollar or two for a dozen free-range eggs I am sure that consumers will, by and large, support the free-range industry.

That does not mean that we leave it up to consumers. The Government has an obligation to lead, an obligation to educate and an obligation to respond to community standards. If those standards mean that we are not going to tolerate that type of cruelty that is what we should do. That is why the member for Wollongong and I have spoken about this in the Chamber tonight. I recognise the presence in the public gallery of members of Animal Liberation New South Wales and the animal protection institution Voiceless. They are long-time campaigners for the banning of the caging of chickens. As has occurred in Europe and California, a ban can be phased in over five to 10 years, giving producers time to adjust. The Federal Government might also consider financial assistance to help manage adjustment costs.

We cannot afford to do nothing; that is no longer an option. In 2009, with our knowledge of animal welfare and animal behaviour, the status quo is unethical and unsustainable. There is no point in the industry fighting a rear-guard action; that would only delay the inevitable. Instead of trying to defend a flawed system let us begin the process of transition now. Let us give the egg industry a fair and reasonable opportunity to introduce change so that jobs are protected and the industry adapts gradually. We could start the reform process now by reaching across party and factional lines to support this important project. It is time to stop the cruelty. I ask for bipartisan support on this issue.

A lot of people laugh at those who want to free caged chickens, and I have had my share of that. This reminds me of the 1980s when George Paciullo said that he wanted to introduce random breath testing. At that time he was scoffed at and laughed at and told that his idea was ridiculous and that it would never happen. However, 20 years later breath testing has saved many lives and is now part of our society. I believe that by the constant campaigning of organisations such as Voiceless and Animal Liberation New South Wales, with the support of members of Parliament who feel very strongly about this issue, this will be the start of working towards freeing chickens from appalling and cruel conditions.

In years to come people will look back on this evening and say that this is where it all started. They will look back on this evening and find it hard to believe that chickens were treated as cruelly as they are treated today in barns, where they never see sunlight, never touch grass and resort to cannibalism. It is an absolute disgrace, and something needs to be done about it—and it needs to start now.

Discussion concluded.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to standing and sessional orders, at 6.47 p.m. until
Thursday 29 October 2009 at 10.00 a.m.**
