

LEGISLATIVE ASSEMBLY

Thursday 7 May 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.

REAL PROPERTY AND CONVEYANCING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT 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.

BUDGET ESTIMATES AND RELATED PAPERS

Financial Year 2008-09

Debate resumed from 23 October 2008.

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [10.08 a.m.]: I have concluded my speech.

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

Motion agreed to.

GREYHOUND RACING BILL 2009

HARNESS RACING BILL 2009

RACING LEGISLATION AMENDMENT BILL 2009

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 2 April 2009.

Mr GEORGE SOURIS (Upper Hunter) [10.09 a.m.]: I have the pleasure and privilege of speaking on behalf of the Coalition on the Greyhound Racing Bill 2009, the Harness Racing Bill 2009 and the Racing Legislation Amendment Bill 2009. Essentially, the cognate bills contain three major features: to disassemble the Greyhound and Harness Racing Regulatory Authority and transfer most of the regulatory functions to Greyhound Racing New South Wales and Harness Racing New South Wales, to provide for an independent board for Greyhound Racing New South Wales and Harness Racing New South Wales, and to provide for an independent integrity auditor.

At the outset I would like to acknowledge that the two commercial organisations, Greyhound Racing New South Wales and Harness Racing New South Wales, have exhibited a much sharper commercial focus than had been evident in the direction and administration of the two codes prior to the establishment of these two commercial organisations. Under both chairmen, many overdue reforms and much-needed commerciality have emerged. It is a credit to both chairpersons and the boards and staff that this has taken place. Also, credit must go to the work of the regulatory authority and its chief executive officer in containing costs and operating professionally. I acknowledge therefore Professor Percy Allan, Graeme Campbell, Brent Hogan, Max Pool and John Coghlan.

A number of features deserve special comment. Firstly, this is the fourth restructure of the codes or the industry or parts thereof over the 15-year period of the Labor Government. It has been an unsettled time but I believe this legislation may provide the basis for a more stable future. On that basis the Coalition will not be opposing this legislation. On the question of integrity, the separation of commercial and regulatory functions was by its nature a strong safeguard for the integrity of the two codes. I understand, however, that it was an unhappy marriage from the start and that at some point in the future, that point now having arrived, there would be some kind of dissolution of this marriage. The devolution of regulatory functions exposes the integrity of the code to commercial cost cutting and similar practices. It is obvious that an integrity auditor would need to be included, albeit an additional layer of either bureaucracy or governance.

Despite the unhappiness that the two codes constantly exhibited towards the combined regulatory authority, it nonetheless was separated from the commercial functions that the other two organisations undertook. I know that previous Ministers and many members have made contributions in this place regarding the importance of keeping separate, and therefore independent, the regulatory functions of these two sports. We need to be careful and know precisely where we are heading, and to understand that all the arguments that were put on the subject remain just as valid today as they were in the past. It was probably economic rationalism that saw the codes' regulatory authorities combined rather than any other aspect. Given that we are now separating the two codes' regulatory functions but not re-establishing two separate regulatory bodies that would be additional to the two commercial organisations, it is obvious to me that the economics of the situation dictated many of the outcomes.

On the question of an independent board, I observe that this is an attempt to mirror the formula and structure that Racing New South Wales has, and which I believe is operating well although we have not had many months in which to judge that. I support the concepts of independence and the appointment on merit of the two proposed boards. This principle has taken many years to bed down in Racing New South Wales and I sincerely hope it is not as troublesome a period for the greyhound racing and harness racing codes as we have seen with Racing New South Wales. I appreciate that the Greyhound Racing New South Wales board especially has a number of misgivings about independence and the proposed structure. It is the same point that was made in relation to Racing New South Wales: it is almost impossible to find quality potential board members who have an interest in and knowledge of racing, or in this case greyhound racing and harness racing, but who would not have any role or position with a participating stakeholder and therefore be capable of qualifying as an independent board member. That is indeed a problem, but we shall see how that unfolds.

Another point that the Greyhound Racing New South Wales board sought to make was the need for representation in its broadest sense on a board. It recommended an eight-member board, not the five-member board that is contained in this legislation. An eight-member board would provide in addition to the independent members other members who could be appointed by the industry to represent it. Greyhound Racing New South Wales's misgivings, as far as the Opposition is concerned, have come to the fore a little late. There has been considerable consultation on this bill over a period of time. Maybe the Government has not sought to consult vigorously, but it has nonetheless been available and the Government no doubt has been open to such consultation. The bill was tabled about a month ago, I think, and there has been a sufficient period of time for consultation. It has been only in the last 48 hours that these concerns have been raised.

I regret that I am unable to bring these concerns about the board to the table in any meaningful way. I fear there will be seeds of continuing discontent and, depending on the extent of the discontent, there is potential for destabilisation of the process in the initial stages and in an ongoing way. I would not be surprised if this discontent fomented itself sufficiently to require further ministerial and/or legislative intervention in relation to board structure. I have observed this with much Government business and many pieces of legislation that involve the establishment of some kind of board of governance, in whatever organisation we are talking about, and the issue always revolves around representation, whether stakeholder involvement or these types of things. We shall see to what extent this takes place but I would not be surprised if a further modification of this model is necessary at some time in the future.

The legislation will also establish consultative committees for the two codes and I am very supportive of that. I am pleased to see that it is indeed a consultative role and nothing more. It would be misleading to imagine that there could be an external body of stakeholders that could in some way veto or dictate policy and/or decision making to an independent board. It would be impossible for a board to operate under any other model. I am pleased to see that that is the case and that the errors in the second last piece of legislation introduced, pertaining to the establishment of the board of Racing New South Wales, were not replicated in this legislation.

I turn now to costs generally and employee provisions. There is considerable apprehension about approximately \$1 million of accumulated liabilities such as long service leave that will be inherited on the books of Greyhound Racing New South Wales and Harness Racing New South Wales. Extensive discussions have been conducted about this point. I accept and understand that whilst these liabilities will not necessarily come home to roost in the immediate future, they might come home to roost a lot earlier than would have been the case had the existing structure remained. Nonetheless, the structure is self-financing for the two codes, so these costs would have been borne by the industry in any case. The issue is simply the timing and how quickly some of these liabilities might turn into actual expenses that would otherwise have been delayed. Given the employee provisions that will allow them not necessarily to transfer to the two new entities, it may well be that some of these liabilities will occur earlier than would otherwise have been the case.

The legislation originally included only a one-year guarantee of continuing employment. These employees would be transferred to a corporatised entity with all the implications that entails in relation to their security of tenure and permanency in the public service and so on. I have considerable sympathy for the apprehension being experienced by those employees, including those who will transfer. Unfortunately, the Industrial Court had to intervene and it made a number of recommendations that have led the Government to produce two amendments, which the Coalition will support. One of the amendments will extend the one-year guarantee to two years. When I say that it is unfortunate, I mean that I regret that the employees had to resort to this process to achieve a greater degree of justice, not that the Government intends to make that amendment, which the Coalition certainly supports.

The award will also contain a provision covering a 4 per cent salary increase for two successive years. The Coalition will also support that amendment. When a government is required to amend its own legislation prior to the completion of the parliamentary debate it gives the impression that it was being too harsh with employees or was trying to get away with something about which it should have had a greater sense of responsibility. It suggests that it should have taken greater care and demonstrated more sympathy for the good employees who have served this industry—these two codes and the regulatory authority—some for 30 years or more. It says that the Government was being too crude, too harsh and taking a heavy-handed economic rationalist line in dealing with these good public servants who have undergone and are who are still undergoing a period of uncertainty and apprehension.

The restructure was put in place some time ago, ahead of the passage of this legislation. I find it extraordinary that the chief executive officer would be dismissed and treated so badly despite his and the regulatory authority's performance being so good. The dismantling of the structure started well before the debate on this legislation and it can now not be reversed. If the legislation were rejected by this Parliament, the restructure could not be reversed in any meaningful sense. The Government should have been more decent about this and at least awaited the passage of this legislation before using stealth and the exercise of its governmental powers to reform and remodel these two codes, as is provided for in the legislation.

It may not be in the interests of the three codes for the stewards' roles to be merged. Stewarding is a complicated matter and the integrity of the industry depends on it. Multiskilling may be technically feasible, but knowledge of the culture of each code would be consequentially diluted. It would be better not to include this provision in the bill but to require a future Minister to return to Parliament to amend the legislation should that path be pursued. The industry has experienced a great deal of apprehension about the prospect that the roles of the stewards of the three codes of racing could be merged or multiskilled and, as I said, the level of expertise possibly diluted.

As is often the case, the Opposition has only limited access to information. Whilst I have had made available to me officers to provide briefings, it is nonetheless a matter of trust that I have recommended to the Coalition not to oppose these cognate bills. The reform generally arises out of the Scott review, which was the statutory five-year review of the legislation, and the Cameron wagering review. I have not been deaf to the overwhelming view of participants in both codes about disassociating the greyhound and harness racing codes bearing in mind the nature of the two sports, their culture and history and their desire to control and to regulate their own destiny. Finally, I thank the Minister and the Minister's staff, in particular Mr Steve McMahon—who took delivery of a lovely daughter, Elouise Kathleen, seven weeks ago today—Mr David Crewdson and departmental staff member Mr Frank Marzic for their briefings and courtesies. I commend the bill.

The SPEAKER: I also congratulate Steve McMahon on that wonderful addition.

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [10.28 a.m.]: I support these cognate bills—the Greyhound Racing Bill 2009, the Harness Racing Bill 2009 and the Racing Legislation Amendment Bill 2009—and thank the

Opposition for its support and the role that the shadow Minister has played. The fact that these bills are being dealt with cognately means that members must make an extra effort to read them and thoroughly understand their objectives. The member for Camden, the shadow Minister and member for Upper Hunter, the member for Hawkesbury and a few others who have a special interest in this area have often spoken about greyhound, harness and thoroughbred racing.

Under this legislation the functions of the Greyhound and Harness Racing Regulatory Authority and the Greyhound and Harness Racing Appeals Tribunal once again will be amalgamated into one authority. When a decision was made in 2002 to amalgamate those bodies it was not necessarily a popular decision in my electorate, which houses the Bankstown City Paceway. Over a period the paceway lost races and that severely impacted on the income of trainers and drivers—who invariably are the same—and on the industry generally. The member for Camden will probably have more to say about greyhound racing.

East Hills was once home to a greyhound track that was called the dog track. In the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s it was a great venue but the site quickly became disused swampland, which has now been reclaimed and which now houses 119 units. That is just one example of how greyhound racing suffered as a result of the glamour and money that could be made from thoroughbred racing. I am sure that many members take a keen interest—I am sure the member for Swansea would not mind me saying that he takes a keen interest—in horses. Throughout history people have been racing animals, which is fantastic if those animals are well treated. That is why we have so many regulations and rules in this State, especially when wagering is involved.

Not many members in this Chamber would not be interested in a horse called Takeover Target—a remarkable rising 10-year-old that is trained by Joe Janiak—that has won \$5 million or \$6 million, and that will probably win more by the time it has finished. Those who read the debate on this bill might wonder what this has to do with the legislation, but it is imperative for governments to regulate these sorts of issues. The shadow Minister said earlier that once the legislation was enacted there would be subsequent reviews of the legislation and consultation with stakeholders.

It is not easy to get harness racing, greyhound racing and thoroughbred racing interests to agree. The shadow Minister referred also to the tasks allotted to stewards, whom I hope can tell the difference between a greyhound and a horse! When great animals are racing I am not impressed by the regulations that brought about the event but rather by the determination of those animals to excel. Last week Sunline, which had an illness that could not be treated, was put down. Sunline was one of the greatest mares that Australia had ever seen, until Makybe Diva. When animals such as those are racing they capture the imagination of the nation.

Human athletes are paid a fortune to compete in events. I do not want my speech to sound like a John Kerr speech in which I say, "Well done" to the horse and all that sort of stuff, but animals receive nothing other than an extra feed, a lump of sugar, or a pat on the back when they race. They are well liked by their trainers, their strappers and all those involved with them. Some people have a passion for these animals. Greyhound owners and trainers, and harness racing drivers and trainers do not make a lot of money; they engage in those activities for the love of them. Many properties in Condor Park have training facilities and stables in their backyards. For many years those properties have been zoned for stables but people are always saying, "We do not want to live near those stables. We do not want horses in our backyards." Those stables have been in Condor Park for 40 and 50 years.

I have mentioned before in this House that some of my great uncles were Melbourne Cup winning jockeys who owned properties in Randwick. I would love to think there were areas in Randwick that still had stables, cobblestones and stalls. We deal with many serious pieces of legislation in this House that are enacted to assist us to govern this State. In my electorate more people would take a direct interest in this legislation than they would in other motions and bills that are passed. I will now refer to the Harness Racing Bill 2009.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): I would appreciate that.

Mr ALAN ASHTON: I appreciate the wide discretion given to me by the Acting-Speaker. Some time ago I was not happy about the fact that the Harness Racing Regulatory Authority was to be amalgamated with the greyhound authority. I believe it is appropriate to separate those two bodies. The object of the bill is to separate harness racing from greyhound racing and to continue harness racing as constituted under the Harness Racing Act 2002. The Harness Racing Bill 2009 will provide for the transfer of the functions of harness racing and functions relating to harness racing currently exercised by the Greyhound and Harness Racing Regulatory Authority, which were dissolved by the Greyhound Racing Bill 2009. Briefly, we are returning to the good old days when harness racing, greyhound racing and thoroughbred racing were able to look after themselves.

Mr George Souris: You have remained unhappy about the marriage from day one.

Mr ALAN ASHTON: The member for Upper Hunter made a good point; it was a marriage of inconvenience. I hate to use the term "shotgun marriage" when we are talking about animals, but from day one I was not overly enthusiastic about that marriage. I am pleased that, as a result of the Scott and Cameron reviews—issues to which the member for Upper Hunter referred—those groups will now be separated. It is not so much a question of the Government making a mistake; it is more a question of the amalgamation just not working. At the time it was an agreed policy and that is how people wanted to move. It has been recognised that it has not worked as well as it could have worked and that several difficulties could not be overcome. Those three organisations should be separated: each organisation requires the same degree of oversight and an independent board of review.

The legislation must also define the important role to be played by stewards. The Government has consulted with the industry in relation to this matter and the shadow Minister said earlier that in the past 48 hours there has been some criticism of what might have happened in one area. These bills have been on display for some time and the Government's intent is clear. Obviously the Government has spoken also to members on the crossbenches and to Opposition members. Government and Opposition members usually arrive at a degree of consistency in relation to these matters, so the legislation cannot be wrong. Those who have major concerns with this legislation should not leave it until the last two days to throw out something that has been before the House for some time. I support these cognate bills. This Government is doing the right thing. I appreciate the Opposition's support for these bills.

Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN (Camden) [10.39 a.m.]: It is a great pleasure to support the Greyhound Racing Bill 2009, the Harness Racing Bill 2009 and the Racing Legislation Amendment Bill 2009—cognate bills, as pointed out by the member for East Hills. I am fortunate to have had a great interest in harness racing since the early 1970s. I regularly attended Harold Park on a Friday night and, when I moved to Camden, I quite regularly attended Menangle Park on a Monday night, until Menangle stopped functioning properly. It was a great pleasure—and I spoke about it in the House last year—to see the reopening of the Menangle Park Paceway on 29 June 2008. The new 1,400-metre paceway is a great, world-class facility. Menangle Park was in my electorate, but that changed with the 2007 redistribution.

In the two years before Menangle Park reopened I was heavily involved with Paul Fitzpatrick, the leading harness racing trainer in New South Wales and, in my view, Australia. Paul and his family trained me to participate in a race with the then Minister for Gaming and Racing, the Hon. Grant McBride, on Miracle Mile night in 2006. Paul often took the opportunity to tell me how hopeless the structure of harness racing and greyhound racing was since they had been forced together. He felt that too much money was being spent on bureaucracy and not enough was coming back to the participants—the rationalisation had not worked. I support his view. This review by the Government, which was supported by the Opposition spokesman, has led to harness racing being separated from greyhound racing and from Racing New South Wales. It is adopting the Racing New South Wales model. It is particularly important that this legislation is passed because there is an interregnum in harness racing in appointing a board to deal with some pressing issues, which I think it best not to raise here.

I have had several visits from trainers and participants concerned about the lack of progress in harness racing, and the need to get the new model in place and operating as quickly as possible. Like the Opposition spokesman, I also am disappointed that at the last minute the greyhound racing industry decided to raise concerns about the bill. Yesterday at lunchtime I saw Bill Mangafas, one of my constituents and President of the Greyhound Breeders Owners and Trainers Association [GBOTA], walking out of the building with four or five participants in greyhound racing. Unfortunately, due to time constraints, I did not have time to talk to him. However, had I known he was here to express some concerns I would have taken the time to talk to him. The last time I was with Bill Mangafas was about five weeks ago when I attended the Bulli greyhound racing night in memory of a member of the industry who had passed away. I had a very interesting and entertaining night. I was in the broadcast tower with the inimitable Paul Ambrosoli. Paul managed to talk to me within one second of the race starting, turn his head as the dogs jumped and call the race without missing a beat—I still do not know how he does it.

Mr George Souris: He is one in a million.

Mr GEOFF CORRIGAN: He is incredible. I have heard Paul Ambrosoli at Liverpool Greyhound Breeders Owners and Trainers Association presentation nights, which I always attend along with my good

friend from 2KY Greg Radley. Greg always comes along to the Liverpool Association because of a little lady named Patty West. Patty is not very tall but she is a dynamo. She insists that the local members go along, so I go along, and Greg Radley always goes along to compere the function for fear that he will end up in trouble with Patty if he does not. I congratulate Patty West and all those at the Liverpool Greyhound Breeders Owners and Trainers Association, and also the Camden branch of the association. I have not been to one of Camden's presentation nights for a while.

New South Wales conducts more greyhound races and maintains more racetracks than any other Australian jurisdiction. Further, New South Wales has the second-highest number of registered persons, 9,587, behind Victoria with 11,257. New South Wales is renowned for its major contribution to the Australian greyhound racing breeding stocks, with 6,039 greyhounds racing in 2006-07, in comparison with 3,912 in Victoria and 1,475 in Queensland. Of course, that does not tell the whole picture. The Wheeler family, who used to be based primarily at The Oaks and is now based at Orange, has the largest breeding operation for greyhounds in Australia. That family has been somewhat disenchanted with the industry. I hope this legislation and the changes it brings will make them happier.

Paul Wheeler, the leading breeder and owner in Australia, refuses to race his greyhounds in New South Wales because of problems with prize money and within the industry. If you see a greyhound with a "Bale" suffix, it is definitely a greyhound owned by the Wheeler family. You will often see four or five "Bales" in one race, and quite often they will take first, second and third places. Paul and his brother came to see me about artificial insemination of greyhounds and some problems they were having with registration. I was able to help them with that. They expressed concern about greyhound racing in New South Wales. These changes will satisfy their concerns and make greyhound racing a lot more efficient.

At times it seems that I have the entire 9,857 participants in greyhound racing in my electorate. Of course, that is not the case, but through the rural backblocks of Liverpool and Camden greyhound racing is a significant industry with a lot of participants. As the member for East Hills said, you will never get rich being a greyhound trainer, and at times it seems there are a lot of jealousies in the industry. Whenever I go to a presentation night or a function, or even to a local Camden Labor Party branch meeting, people tell me how much better greyhound racing would be if only we were to adopt their ideas, get rid of the Greyhound Breeders Owners and Trainers Association or change the president.

This new model is a better model for greyhound racing and it is also a better model for my other great love in life, harness racing. This organisation needs to work properly. As the Opposition spokesman said, the legislation should be reviewed regularly to make sure it is working properly. We have to be big enough to make those changes where they are needed rather than being pigheaded and sticking to a model that is not working. I have read the Scott review. This is an excellent way to go, but let us keep it under review and make sure it continues to work well. It is a great pleasure to support these cognate bills.

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [10.47 a.m.]: I will make a brief contribution to the Greyhound Racing Bill 2009, the Harness Racing Bill 2009 and the Racing Legislation Amendment Bill 2009. The main purpose of these three bills is to reform and update the statutory arrangements that underpin the governance of both the greyhound and harness racing industries. The bills repeal the Greyhound and Harness Racing Administration Act 2004, dissolve the Greyhound and Harness Racing Regulatory Authority, plus repeal the Greyhound Racing Act 2002 and the Harness Racing Act 2002. The legislation will transfer the functions and responsibilities of each dissolved authority into one single controlling body for each of the greyhound and harness racing codes.

It will provide an independent board structure for Greyhound Racing New South Wales and Harness Racing New South Wales based upon the recently introduced Racing New South Wales model. It will also provide for an independent integrity auditor function across all three codes to investigate and act upon complaints about the conduct of racing officials, while contributing significant savings. In his agreement in principle speech the Minister paid tribute to the boards and the chairs of Greyhound Racing New South Wales and Harness Racing New South Wales. That is very deserved, because such a significant change in the way the industries will operate could not have been accomplished without their support.

Like the member for Camden, I, too, have been quite an avid follower of harness racing and the greyhounds. When I lived in Sydney, in Leichhardt, my wife and I were regular visitors to Harold Park. Some 15 or more years ago Wentworth Park went through a significant redevelopment, where the grass was replaced with artificial turf. I happened to be browsing through the local paper and saw an advertisement for turf: if you

want it, pick it up and you can have it. I hooked on the trailer and off I went. I have my own little piece of Wentworth Park in the backyard. I used to joke with my friends that you could sit there with a beer and almost see the greyhounds flashing by.

Mr Kevin Greene: After a couple of beers.

Mr PETER DRAPER: After a couple of beers, possibly, yes. It was a nice little piece of history. It was not an overly large piece of the greyhound track. To give members an idea of its size, I could start the lawnmower, do one lap around the outside, turn off the petrol and finish the job. Change is in the wind in my local area too. Earlier this week I met with Rex Horne, Chairman of the New South Wales Harness Racing Club, to offer my support for its plans to sell the Harold Park facility in Glebe and relocate operations to the west of Sydney. A sale of the Glebe facility would offer an unprecedented opportunity for housing and recreation in an area very close to the Sydney central business district, which does not happen very often. A rezoning application is before the Minister for Planning, and I have written to the Minister expressing my support for the application.

The sale of Harold Park also would free up funds that would be invested in relocating the Tamworth harness and greyhound facilities to an area in which the Tamworth Jockey Club conducts its thoroughbred activities. Detailed planning for this relocation has taken place already. Basically the aim is to create a state-of-the-art racing precinct to cater for all three codes, which would become a significant asset for my local district and would open up a range of opportunities for all three codes. It would provide an opportunity also to examine the allocation of race meetings, which could be done better than it is at present, and hopefully provide country organisers with additional opportunities to showcase their sports.

Acceptance within the industry seems to be that change based on a foundation of appropriate and modern governance is necessary if we are to be viable in the future. All three codes accept that change is needed to meet the challenges of the present economic climate. These bills will provide a new framework that will take the industry into the future. It is important to realise that government does not underpin the racing industry's operations. The industry is self-funding and contributes an enormous amount to the State's economy. The greyhound industry contributes more than \$469 million a year to the economy and provides some 7,000 full-time jobs, while the harness racing industry contributes some \$680 million a year and provides 9,000 jobs. A billion dollars from those two industries is a significant contribution to our State. I support the bills and commend them to the House.

Mr ROBERT COOMBS (Swansea) [10.51 a.m.]: I, too, speak with some enthusiasm on these racing cognate bills and hope that this new supporting regulation translates into the ability to back more winners, although I am not sure it will work quite that way.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): I notice members are taking a lot of interest in this debate!

Mr George Souris: The industry needs people like you.

Mr ROBERT COOMBS: Yes. I was once a secretary of a punter's club, but we went into receivership after about four days.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): After that comment, does the member for Swansea wish to contribute to this debate?

Mr ROBERT COOMBS: I do, because it is very important. It is inevitable that this growing industry will go through more change. It is important to have regulations in place that enable such growth and ensure that this important industry remains on foot. I will reflect a little and go back to the 1990s when I was a board member of radio 2KY, which had the contract with the TAB to call the races.

Mr George Souris: Which I renewed. I was Minister for Sport, Recreation and Racing at the time.

Mr ROBERT COOMBS: There you go. 2KY is a marvellous radio station: It celebrated its seventy-fifth birthday not that long ago. In the 1990s race meetings were held every Wednesday and Saturday. Some harness and greyhound races operated outside those days but basically racing was built around those two days. I remember the struggle and concern of the 2KY board when Sunday racing was introduced. Members will recall it was introduced on a casual basis, with either half a dozen or dozen Sunday race meetings held

throughout the year. Of course, the General Manager of the station, Barrie Unsworth, who is well known in this place, had the task of informing rugby league callers Greg Hartley and Peter Peters that they would be stood down for the day: there was no need to call the football because our prime responsibility was to call the races. Not long after that 2KY ceased broadcasting the rugby league because of the proliferation of Sunday race meetings. Sunday race meetings are now the norm—race meetings are held every day of the week.

The racing industry contributes an enormous amount of money to the economy. It generates approximately 50,000 part-time or full-time jobs and contributes an estimated \$1 billion to the State's gross domestic product. The racing industry is a significant and important contributor to the economy and leisure activities. There has been some criticism of the legislation, as is always the case when new legislation unfolds, but I point out that our response to the industry and all interested parties was provided on 3 January 2009. That response was provided after a massive amount of consultation not just in the Parliament but also with key industry players, organisations and the betting fraternity in general.

It is estimated that greyhound racing in New South Wales invests more than \$468 million from direct spending into the New South Wales economy. It is estimated that in 2003 the greyhound racing industry was responsible for the creation and maintenance of 6,990 full-time equivalent jobs. Throughout this State the greyhound racing industry is involved heavily in supporting charities and disadvantaged community organisations. On many occasions the three racing codes raise money for charities, sporting organisations or individuals who may be doing it tough. Racing is not only for breeders, owners, trainers and spectators: it also plays an important role in ensuring our charitable organisations are well supported.

The Greyhound Racing Bill 2009 is important because New South Wales runs more greyhound races and maintains more racetracks than any other Australian jurisdiction. I believe the other States will use this new legislation as a yardstick to ensure their racing industries are properly supported. New South Wales has the second-highest number of registered persons in greyhound racing, with 9,857. Victoria has the highest number of registered persons/owners at 11,257. New South Wales is renowned for its major contribution to Australian greyhound racing breeding stocks, with 6,039 greyhounds named in 2006-07 compared with 3,912 in Victoria and 1,475 in Queensland. New South Wales has the largest overall racing and breeding statistics.

The harness racing industry also can boast the same sort of growth figures and attraction. It also provides an annual benefit to the New South Wales economy of approximately \$680 million and employs something like 29,000 people. I reiterate that it is important we maintain flexibility in the industry and continue to focus on the importance of the industry in a large range of areas. I commend the legislation to the House.

Mr ALLAN SHEARAN (Londonderry) [10.59 a.m.]: I speak in support of the Greyhound Racing Bill 2009, the Harness Racing Bill 2009 and the Racing Legislation Amendment Bill 2009. The main purpose of the bills is to reform and update the statutory arrangements that underpin the governance arrangements of the greyhound and harness racing industries; repeal the Greyhound and Harness Racing Administration Act 2004 and consequently disband the Greyhound and Harness Racing Regulatory Authority; repeal the Greyhound Racing Act 2002 and Harness Racing Act 2002 and by way of new legislation transfer functions and responsibilities of the disbanded authority to a single controlling body for each of the greyhound and harness racing codes; provide for an independent board structure for Greyhound Racing New South Wales and Harness Racing New South Wales based on the recently introduced Racing New South Wales code; provide for an independent integrity auditor to function across all three codes to receive and consider complaints about the conduct of racing officials; and provide for necessary savings and transitional arrangements.

I profess that I am no expert on the racing industry but I have two significant venues in the electorate of Londonderry, namely, the Richmond Greyhound Racing Club and the Hawkesbury Race Club, and I have a healthy relationship with the officials of those two clubs. The people involved in this significant industry have told me they are in favour of the proposals in these bills. As recently as last week, the Minister and I attended the Hawkesbury Race Club for the Hawkesbury Gold Cup, a very successful event. On that day Brian Fletcher, the chief executive officer, made a number of complimentary remarks regarding the Minister and the Government about the legislation.

I had numerous talks with different committee members, including Sid Kelly. Every now and again when I visit these race tracks I get a few tips but unfortunately they do not seem to do me any good. I put a few bob on and more often than not I come out the loser. Those officials have great ambition and foresight for the Hawkesbury track. Consideration is being given to lengthening the straight with a view to the Hawkesbury Race Club track eventually becoming one of the major metropolitan venues. These measures will not only promote Hawkesbury but also benefit racing generally in New South Wales.

Richmond Greyhound Racing Club is a smaller club but has enormous potential. Since greyhound racing was introduced at the club in 1955 the club has established itself as a premier greyhound facility. It has over 100 race meetings per year and is probably one of the major successes of greyhound racing in New South Wales. I have spoken a number of times over the past year with the President, Mark Malone, and Vice-President, Ivan Tilley and at the time they seemed to be fairly impressed with the direction of the proposals. I understand concerns have been raised today but I have not been acquainted with those concerns. Notwithstanding, generally both sides of the House and the industry support these measures, which suggests that we are heading in the right direction.

Last year I was fortunate to be present at the opening of the Patrons Lounge and the De Bortoli function room of Richmond Greyhound Racing Club. This latest enhancement work will help make the club a first-class venue for the conduct of race meetings. I acknowledge also Greyhound Racing New South Wales, which, under the venue master plan initiative, assisted in the funding of this facility, along with the provision of a lift for people with a disability. That is most welcome and will be part of the success of the club into the future. Richmond Greyhound Racing Club is destined for continued success for patrons locally and those throughout New South Wales.

As mentioned by previous speakers, I reiterate that it is estimated that the industry provides direct full-time and part-time employment for 50,000 people and it contributes an estimated \$1 billion to the State's gross domestic product. With those figures and with the support of the industry generally—and the consensus shown in this House—the potential for the success of this legislation is evident. The only negative aspect was that in the lead-up to the introduction of the bills one of the stewards approached me to express concern about future arrangements. I consulted the Minister, who assured me that full consultation is underway and that the jobs of all stewards will be protected. I am sure that eventually they will come to appreciate what is proposed. On that note, I commend these bills.

Mr GRANT McBRIDE (The Entrance) [11.06 a.m.]: I support the Greyhound Racing Bill 2009, the Harness Racing Bill 2009 and the Racing Legislation Amendment Bill 2009. I acknowledge, firstly, that I am not a member of the Labor caucus punters club and I am never likely to be one. I also acknowledge the Opposition's support for the bills. There could be no-one more experienced on this matter in the whole of New South Wales than the shadow Minister, George Souris, the member for Upper Hunter. He has been the shadow Minister for Racing for 14 years. He has been totally supportive of the industry: he attends all the functions, has been a great representative for his side of Parliament and supports changes necessary for the industry. He understands possibly better than anyone the need for change in the greyhound and harness racing industries. The member for Camden pointed out that before the 2006 Miracle Mile we had a race out there. I trained for three months for that event.

Mr Gerard Martin: Are we talking about greyhounds here?

Mr GRANT McBRIDE: No, we are talking about harness racing. I learned a lot about that, not that I did not know a lot about horses—even though I never gambled on them, I used to ride horses. I should probably be in The Nationals because I am one of the few people in the Parliament who can actually ride and saddle a horse. I found out that harness-racing horses actually go at 55 kilometres an hour, and there is no seatbelt on the gig. It is quite an experience. It gave me insight into the industry: the opportunity to talk directly to trainers, to be on site and see their training facilities. I was able to talk to people who work in the industry, from the guy at the top to those at the bottom.

Ministers tend to be exposed only to the people at the top. I give credit to the member for Camden because I think when he attended facilities in his area it was the first time he had ever been near a horse in his life. I went to a number of facilities in the Cessnock area. We were able to understand and get a feel for the industry—an industry that is run on passion, not run money or self-aggrandisement. The people involved live pretty tough, spartan lives and the money in the industry is quite small, considering the effort they put in. The wages are very low, and the work is arduous, repetitive and tough. Those who are in the racing industry are committed to it.

The history of the racing industry goes back to the privatisation of the TAB in the mid-1990s, which changed the whole structure of the funding. That structural change then led to a change in the amounts of money that went to the various racing codes. The codes that were possibly less insulated from that were greyhound racing and harness racing. Because of the nature and history of greyhound racing there are greyhound racing tracks across the whole of New South Wales. Supporting those tracks costs an enormous amount of money. In contrast, Victoria has fewer than 20 greyhound racing tracks operating, of which about 11 are major tracks. Also, the geography of Victoria is so different because it is a genuinely regional area. The largest city, town or region outside Newcastle is Geelong, and it has only 100,000 people. The population centres are spread evenly.

The Victorian tracks are sustainable because they have a local community that can go to the track—and in regional areas they still go to the track. Here in New South Wales people do not go to the track. You can go to any racetrack—and I will not name one—on a race night and you will find very few people there. So we do not have the source of income from racing that Victoria has. As well, we do not have the income that comes from Tattersall's. So Victoria has an additional stream of funds. In summary, we do not have the people at the track, we have a lot more tracks, and we do not have the extra income stream that is available to Victoria.

Putting those factors together, the New South Wales racing industry is basically running on the smell of an oily rag, as some would say. Changes need to be made. When I was Minister it was clear that the industry was not working and that changes needed to be made. Further changes will be needed in the future. Importantly, however, the Government and the Minister have recognised the need to make those changes. If changes are not made the industry will slowly ebb away. I hope the changes will make a difference and will put both the greyhound racing industry and the harness racing industry on a firm footing into the future.

I congratulate all those who have been involved in drafting the changes—at the industry level, the board level, and everyone else—on the way they have gone through these successive changes and continued their commitment to their sport and industry. The bill is necessary and it is good that it is being done. It is good that the Minister, rather than making minor changes, is making radical changes that are needed to put the industry back on a firm footing. I congratulate the Minister on that. I also congratulate the shadow Minister for Gaming and Racing on his continued support for the Government in getting the best outcome for the industry.

Mr PAUL GIBSON (Blacktown) [11.13 a.m.]: Every speaker on the Greyhound Racing Bill 2009, the Harness Racing Bill 2009 and the Racing Legislation Amendment Bill 2009 virtually said the same thing, which is absolutely true: changes had to be made. I believe the changes that have been made are commonsense. I believe they have been made for the betterment of not just one section of the racing industry but the industry as a whole. The racing industry is a great industry. We have heard about the number of jobs the industry supports. But it also supports many small businesses in country towns, in outer Sydney areas and in the cities. Without that support many small businesses would be doing it very tough.

Racing is a great panacea. Looking back at the history of racing during the Depression, for example—and I was not born then; I am not that old—there were the largest crowds ever on racetracks anywhere. People went to the racetracks not only to put a few bob on and try to back a winner; they went there with the hope of forgetting the problems of the day. They went to the track because it was fairly cheap entertainment. It was a very important part of the panacea process that followed on from the Depression and the war. I first started looking at and wondering about racing when I was a young boy in Young.

Mr Kevin Greene: Is that Lambing Flat?

Mr PAUL GIBSON: The boy from Young: "I come from Young, a pretty town up near the Riverina. They grow their cherries by the pound and sell them for a deener." I have never forgotten that. In my early years in Young there was a fellow by the name of Ernie Batnich, who had a cherry orchard. Ernie had a greyhound called Happy Banquet. Happy Banquet was a happy banquet to a lot of people in Young. Not only did he win on the country tracks—

Mr George Souris: They ate it.

Mr PAUL GIBSON: No, they didn't eat it; he ate them. They brought Happy Banquet to Sydney and it was one of the best greyhounds to race in this nation. I have never forgotten it. After that, Ernie's mate had a dog called Macaroona. I will never forget Macaroona either—one of the fastest dogs this nation has ever laid eyes on.

Mr Peter Draper: What about Chief Havoc?

Mr PAUL GIBSON: Yes, Chief Havoc. There have been a lot of them. At the moment we have a horse called Takeover Target and it has won more than \$6 million in prize money. Joe Jaknic is the owner-trainer of it. He bought the horse for virtually nothing.

Mr Kevin Greene: For \$1,370.

Mr PAUL GIBSON: That's right, \$1,370. The Minister is on the job. Takeover Target has won in every State in this nation. He has also won in Singapore, Japan and England. This has given the battler hope. It

does not matter how far down the ladder you might be, there is always a possibility, if you have a bit of luck, that you can really kick on. That is what racing does, through these great racing horses, greyhounds and harness horses: it gives the average punter hope.

I am aware that the Minister has amendments to move to the legislation. The changes give hope to the industry. The better the industry is, the better the whole situation for owners, trainers, and people who go to the track. As I have said before, the racing industry contributes \$1 billion towards the State's gross domestic product. Thousands of jobs are connected with the industry. The member for Londonderry spoke about Brian Fletcher, a good mate of mine who runs the Hawkesbury race club. He is the chief executive officer there and he does a great job. The club has become an integral part of the Richmond-Windsor area, in western Sydney. The club will always put its hand in its pocket, whether it be for fundraising for the Victorian bushfire victims or any other cause. The club does a lot of work for the local area. It also provides a lot of income for small business in the area. It is a credit to the racing industry.

It would be remiss of me if I did not mention in this debate—it is probably the only chance we will get to say something about it—one of the doyens of racing at the moment and one of nature's gentlemen of racing. He has been described as a breed of his own. Many have come before him, but he has been as good as any. I refer to Ian Craig. After 35 years of calling races Ian has announced his retirement. He started with 2UE in 1965 and then went to 2KY in 1968 and has been there ever since. Not only is Ian Craig a great race caller but he is a great human being and a great family man. He is a doyen of the industry and a great example of what racing can do and what sorts of people are connected with the racing game. I wish Ian all the very best in his retirement, as I am sure the whole of the Parliament does. He has done a great job.

As has been said in this debate, both the member for The Entrance as the former Minister and Minister Greene have done a great job in this portfolio. They have been well supported by the Opposition spokesman, the member for Upper Hunter. There have been other people in the racing game who are also doyens of the sport. Kenny Callender and his son Richard Callender play a big role in the articles published about the racing industry. They have always come up with forthright ideas that are good for the industry—not so much good for themselves, for the punter or for the trainer. In their columns and on television they support the ideas that will benefit the industry in the long run. It has been a pleasure to speak to this bill. I congratulate the Minister on the great job he has done.

Mr GERARD MARTIN (Bathurst) [11.20 a.m.]: It is always a hard task to follow the member for Blacktown, one of racing's colourful characters—

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): There have been quite a few colourful characters this morning.

Mr GERARD MARTIN: Yes, there have. I thought it might have been a benefit day for the member for Upper Hunter because I do not think he has had so many supporters from this side of the House in all the time he has been in this place.

Mr George Souris: You are going to provide some balance, are you?

Mr GERARD MARTIN: No, I am going to be swept up in it. In my electorate Lithgow and Bathurst are strong greyhound racing centres and this bill will return certainty and hope to the industry. Everyone would agree that over the last decade there has been turmoil and change in all racing codes, with a raft of rationalisation and change as a result of economic and regulatory pressures. We have had commercial boards, regulatory boards and an amalgamation of thoroughbred and greyhound bodies. This is a sensible outcome for independence but the real challenge for the industry, particularly the greyhound industry, is to give the trainers that supply the stock for the races the hope of stability, in knowing exactly how the setup works. People need to be encouraged back into training.

There is a dedicated band of people in Lithgow. I remember the late Dizzy Farnsworth, who trained a few dogs I had, would be up at 5 o'clock on a winter's morning in Lithgow, which is a challenge: as dark as it can get, with six inches of frost or snow. These trainers and breeders are dedicated and they get out there and train their dogs—they underpin the industry. I am sure they will be heartened by the simple structure contained in the bill. Even though dog racing is supposed to be the working man's sport, it attracts people of all calibres. Bishop Manning, the current Parramatta Catholic Bishop, probably would not like to be reminded of this but

I can remember when he was the assistant parish priest at Lithgow—he presided at my wedding—and was very much into dogs. He had a very good dog called Tivoli Chief, who helped the coffers of St Patrick's parish quite a lot. I am sure that Bishop Manning has moved on but would still enjoy a great love of dogs.

That is one of the great things about the racing industry: you can get in fairly cheaply; it is a great sport and a great way of social inclusion, particularly in country towns. There has been quite a lot of club amalgamation. Bathurst has been the winner in our region, at the expense of Orange to some extent, and Lithgow continues to struggle as a non-TAB track, but the people supported it and the rationalisation was needed. The bill will give certainty to greyhound people. I commend the Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister for Sport and Recreation for introducing the bills. In fact, the Minister will be at Kennerson Park in Bathurst on 20 May to officiate at the opening of its upgraded facilities and I have no doubt he will enjoy his time there. During the equine influenza epidemic the Government put money into all facets of racing, and the money given to the Bathurst club has been well spent on the upgrades. I commend the bill to the House.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Thomas George): This debate has demonstrated the strength of racing in this State. It has brought both sides of the House together. Confessions have been made here this morning.

Mr KEVIN GREENE (Oatley—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) [11.24 a.m.], in reply: I thank all members for their contributions to the debate. I particularly thank the shadow Minister and the Opposition for their support of the Greyhound Racing Bill 2009, the Harness Racing Bill 2009 and the Racing Legislation Amendment Bill 2009. I am sure the shadow Minister has been pleased to hear so many Government members complimenting him on his long tenure as the shadow Minister for racing. There is no truth in the rumour, of course, that he is retiring. With so many good speeches having been made one would have thought the member for Upper Hunter had to be retiring, but I am sure that is not true. In fact, I look forward to his being the shadow Minister for racing not only for the remaining term of this Parliament but well into the next.

Mr George Souris: Those thoughts are reciprocated.

Mr KEVIN GREENE: The Government does appreciate the shadow Minister's contribution to the debate and support of the legislation. I also thank the member for East Hills for his contribution. I have spent a number of occasions with Bankstown president Les Bentley and the member for East Hills at the Bankstown track. Harness racing at Bankstown is held every Monday night. I also thank the member for Camden, Geoff Corrigan, for his contribution. The member for Camden interestingly referred to the well-known racing commentators Greg Radley and Paul Ambrosoli. Greg Radley does some magnificent impersonations of all the race callers. As I was listening to the member for Camden I was reflecting on the influence of racing in this Parliament. I also noted the comments of the Premier yesterday during question time when he used the phrase "London to a brick". We would all well remember that phrase being used in the great racing terminology of that legendary race caller Ken Howard.

I also thank the member for Tamworth, Peter Draper, for his contribution. When I was recently in his electorate I looked at the Tamworth race club, the greyhound facilities and the showground where the harness racing takes place. In discussions I have had with James Treloar, the Mayor of Tamworth, and the member for Tamworth there are some very positive proposals for those three clubs to be brought into a central venue. Tamworth has a very strong racing community with its equine centre and I congratulate the member for Tamworth on the work he is doing in support of the potential consolidation of the three racing codes in Tamworth.

I also thank the member for Swansea for his contribution to the debate. He spoke about various gambling exploits and punting. I recently attended the harness racing in Newcastle with Ross Gigg. There was a storm on that Saturday night when the harness racing was taking place and the track became very wet very quickly as a result, but the club got through that. I also thank the member for Londonderry for his contribution. As the member said, I was at the Hawkesbury racetrack with him last Wednesday. Hawkesbury will also be holding a meeting this coming Saturday and anyone in the area might be interested in that very strong meeting. The member for Hawkesbury also commented on the Richmond dogs. Meetings are held on Friday evenings.

I thank the member for The Entrance, Grant McBride, a former Minister for Gaming and Racing, for his contribution. He spoke of his meetings during his time as Minister with owners and trainers in the greyhound and harness industry—something I also take great pleasure in. A couple of Sundays ago I attended Derby Day at Menangle. I spoke with people such as Neil Day and Paul Fitzpatrick, who are well known in the harness

industry. Over Easter I attended the Golden Easter Egg at Wentworth Park and caught up with some of the trainers and stewards as we looked through the boxing area. Great work is being done there as well. That is why it is important to touch base with those who are at the forefront of the industry.

The member for Blacktown made a contribution in his inimitable fashion. In particular, I agree with him about the jobs tied up in the racing industry—more than 50,000 across the racing industry in New South Wales. It is a major contributor to the economy of New South Wales. The member for Bathurst also contributed to the debate, and I look forward to attending a greyhound race meeting at Bathurst in a couple of weeks time and opening the new facilities. The harness industry in the central west area is particularly strong. Harness racing is very strong throughout the Bathurst, Orange, Cowra and Parkes areas and the region has produced a number of outstanding harness racers, such as Hondo Grattan and Paleface Adios.

The amendments proposed in these three bills reform and update the statutory arrangements that underpin the governance arrangements for the greyhound and harness racing industries. The changes also provide for an independent board structure for Greyhound Racing New South Wales and Harness Racing New South Wales, based on the recently introduced Racing New South Wales model. This is accepted as the best-practice governance model for the racing industry controlling bodies. The shadow Minister, who was very supportive of the changes, referred to representations made to him, and the member for Camden also commented on this issue. I met with representatives of Greyhound Racing New South Wales yesterday to allay some of their concerns. When we talk about an independent model, we mean true independence. But we also recognise that people who are committed to the industry and have extensive knowledge of it should have involvement on those boards. As I said, the shadow Minister was very supportive of that, and I appreciate his support. This issue is clearly covered in the legislation before the House, and I am sure we will be able to move forward.

The bills provide for an industry consultation group in each of the greyhound and harness racing codes, as well as a number of other requirements aimed at facilitating formal and robust consultation between the controlling bodies and industry participants. Joint meetings between each code's consultation group and its industry controlling body are provided for. The controlling body must respond formally to any recommendations put by the consultation group, giving reasons when it does not agree with the group's recommendation. The greyhound and harness racing industries, in consultation with their industry consultation groups, are required to prepare an industry strategic plan within 12 months of the commencement of this amending legislation and to continue consultation to maintain the plan.

The changes provide for the appeal tribunals of all three codes to be dissolved and their functions to be amalgamated and accommodated under a single panel and statute. Under the proposed amalgamated appeal body, to be known as the Racing Appeals Tribunal, the subject of the appeal will continue to be essentially a right to appeal against a disciplinary decision made in accordance with the separate rules of racing that are applicable in the three codes of racing. The new legislation also provides for an independent integrity auditor function across all three codes to receive and consider any complaints about the conduct of racing officials. From a safety point of view, it is pleasing that the legislative provisions in relation to a racecourse invasion, as modelled on the Sporting Venues (Pitch Invasions) Act 2003, will go a long way towards deterring those who choose to enter restricted areas of a racecourse and potentially put themselves and others at grave risk.

Other major reforms provided by the bills are the transfer of the regulatory functions and responsibilities of the Greyhound and Harness Racing Regulatory Authority to Greyhound Racing New South Wales and Harness Racing New South Wales. The result will be a single controlling body for each of the greyhound and harness racing codes and the disbandment of the authority. This change was requested by the overwhelming majority of industry participants, stakeholders and submission makers during the reviews and consultation period. These bills are the result of a great deal of consultation with many people. I thank all those who submitted and contributed to the reform process. The greyhound and harness bills provide for transfer arrangements for former authority staff who wish to take up employment with either Greyhound Racing New South Wales or Harness Racing New South Wales. The basis for the transfer is that authority staff may apply to transfer into future positions with Greyhound Racing New South Wales and Harness Racing New South Wales where the position created has substantially the same duties as an authority staff member's existing position.

The transfer is on a preferential basis and if the staff member elects to transfer there are attractive future conditions of employment. Justice Kavanagh recommended to staff that the proposed conditions are fair and reasonable and in the best interests of the staff. I support Justice Kavanagh's recommendations. In saying so, it is my intent that Greyhound Racing New South Wales and Harness Racing New South Wales advise authority

staff of the exact detail of the future positions in their respective organisations. This should occur immediately upon the passage of these bills through Parliament. Further, it is also my intention to commence legislation after the detailed discussions about future employment conditions for authority staff in Greyhound Racing New South Wales and Harness Racing New South Wales have been resolved.

Separately I will make amendments for the purpose of underpinning the recommendations made on 30 April 2009 by Justice Kavanagh. I wish to take this opportunity to acknowledge the efforts of the staff of the authority during difficult times. I understand that their application to duty has not diminished and that they are providing the best possible service to the people of New South Wales. I wish them well for the future and strongly recommend to Greyhound Racing New South Wales and Harness Racing New South Wales that it is important for business continuity that a core of staff transfer to Greyhound Racing New South Wales and Harness Racing New South Wales. I commend the three bills to the House.

Question—That these bills be now agreed to in principle—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Motion agreed to.

Bills agreed to in principle.

Consideration in detail requested by Mr Kevin Greene.

Consideration in Detail

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! The House shall first deal with the Greyhound Racing Bill 2009. I propose that the House shall deal with the bill in groups of clauses and schedules.

Clauses 1 to 49 agreed to.

Schedules 1 and 2 agreed to.

Mr KEVIN GREENE (Oatley—Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister for Sport and Recreation) [11.37 a.m.], by leave: I move Government amendments Nos 1 and 2 in globo:

No. 1 Page 42, schedule 3, clause 12 (3), line 14. Omit "12 months". Insert instead "24 months".

No. 2 Page 42, schedule 3, clause 12. Insert after line 16:

- (4) An Authority employee who is appointed to a position in the staff of GRNSW in accordance with this clause:
 - (a) is, subject to paragraphs (b) and (c), to be employed by GRNSW during the period referred to in subclause (3) at the same salary that the employee received immediately before ceasing to be an employee of the former Authority, and
 - (b) if the employee is employed by GRNSW on 1 July 2009, is entitled to a 4% increase in the employee's salary at that date, and
 - (c) if the employee is employed by GRNSW on 1 July 2010, is entitled to a further 4% increase in the employee's salary at that date.
- (5) Subclause (4) is subject to any agreement relating to salary between GRNSW and the Authority employee concerned.

The purpose of the amendments to the Greyhound Racing Bill 2009 is to acknowledge the additional consultation and recommendations made in the Industrial Relations Commission by her Honour Justice Kavanagh on 30 April 2009 in relation to this bill and the cognate Harness Racing Bill 2009, which was introduced on 2 April 2009. The amendments have been circulated. Various contentious matters were put before Justice Kavanagh. The recommendations made by Her Honour to the staff of the Greyhound and Harness Racing Regulatory Authority were made on the basis that they are reasonable and in the best interests of the staff. The Government is giving effect to the main recommendations that underpin the overall recommendations.

Mr GEORGE SOURIS (Upper Hunter) [11.39 a.m.]: The Opposition will not oppose the amendments. I thank the Minister for Gaming and Racing, and Minister for Sport and Recreation and the previous speakers for their kind remarks. I reciprocate those remarks. Tuning in to one remark made by the Minister, I reciprocate his invitation to be his counterpart for the Fifty-Fifth Parliament. So that he is aware of

the background, when I was the Minister for Racing, the then shadow Minister eventually became the Minister for Racing and I became his shadow Minister. That positive precedent of reversed roles has proceeded through two former Ministers and the current Minister, but that is too much history to detail now.

As I said during my earlier remarks, it is a criticism that the Government drafted a bill and has now had to amend its bill during its passage through this place. I support the amendments because they bring to the table a level of justice that had been missing for employees. Employees have been treated far too summarily. They became very apprehensive when the restructure had been tabled and commenced, although negotiations over employee transfers and conditions were incomplete. I received a letter on 1 April from one such employee. I will quote a couple of paragraphs that I think will put on the table the great difficulty and uncertainty that the employees endure. The letter stated:

I work at the Greyhound and Harness Racing Regulatory Authority (GHRAA) which is Statutory Authority of the NSW State Government. On 3 February 2009, our Minister Kevin Greene handed down the government decision for the reform of the Greyhound and Harness Racing which included the decision of disbanding our Authority. The reform will mean that all the current GHRAA employees will no longer be public servants and as a consequence many of us will not have a job.

Many of our employees have been an employee of GHRAA over 30 years in servicing both the greyhound and harness industries. Furthermore, the majority of us feel that we have not been given a fair go during the process of this reform especially in the area of staff participation and negotiations prior to the submission of the legislation.

In addition, the major concerns that we feel that both commercial bodies and government have failed to provide us sufficient information regarding the legislations and currently we are very concerned if all our entitlements will be protected after the Authority is disbanded in 30 June 2009.

The legislation was tabled in the Parliament on 31 March 2003, and we worry if the legislation has included all necessary measures in protecting all the employees' welfare since the selling point of this reform process will be a 'null cost' exercise to the government. As a result, we are wondering if the industries can provide sufficient funds to pay all the staff entitlements.

This letter brings to the fore the serious concerns that employees had. I do not think they were dealt with properly and I regret that they had to endure the process that was involved in the formulation of these government amendments, which we support.

Question—That Government amendments Nos 1 and 2 be agreed to—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Government amendments Nos 1 and 2 agreed to.

Schedule 3 as amended agreed to.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! The House will next consider the Harness Racing Bill 2009. I propose that the House shall deal with the bill in groups of clauses and schedules.

Clauses 1 to 49 agreed to.

Schedules 1 and 2 agreed to.

Government amendments Nos 1 and 2, by leave, by Mr Kevin Greene agreed to:

No. 1 Page 41, schedule 3, clause 9 (3), line 33. Omit "12 months". Insert instead "24 months".

No. 2 Page 41, schedule 3, clause 9. Insert after line 35:

- (4) An Authority employee who is appointed to a position in the staff of HRNSW in accordance with this clause:
 - (a) is, subject to paragraphs (b) and (c), to be employed by HRNSW during the period referred to in subclause (3) at the same salary that the employee received immediately before ceasing to be an employee of the former Authority, and
 - (b) if the employee is employed by HRNSW on 1 July 2009, is entitled to a 4% increase in the employee's salary at that date, and
 - (c) if the employee is employed by HRNSW on 1 July 2010, is entitled to a further 4% increase in the employee's salary at that date.
- (5) Subclause (4) is subject to any agreement relating to salary between HRNSW and the Authority employee concerned.

Schedule 3 as amended agreed to.

Consideration in detail concluded.

Passing of the Bill

Motion by Mr Kevin Greene agreed to:

That these bills be now passed.

Bills passed and transmitted to the Legislative Council with a message seeking its concurrence in the bills.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! It being almost 11.45 a.m., the House will now proceed to General Business Notices of Motions (General Notices).

TAMWORTH HOSPITAL REDEVELOPMENT

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [11.44 a.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) congratulates Opposition health spokesperson Jillian Skinner for providing the member for Tamworth with a written commitment to deliver the Tamworth hospital redevelopment, and to identify it as a priority for any future Coalition government;
- (2) condemns Andrew Stoner, Trevor Khan and the NSW Nationals for abandoning the people of Tamworth by walking away from this commitment and instead forming another task force to re-examine the issue; and
- (3) calls on all Nationals members of Parliament to urgently rethink their new position and guarantee that the Tamworth hospital redevelopment, complete with much needed radiotherapy services, will commence in the first term of any future Coalition government.

The redevelopment of Tamworth hospital is essential if the people of the New England and the north-west are to have infrastructure that can meet the increasingly complex and expensive needs of health provision into the future. Tamworth hospital has to deal with many procedures and services formerly available at smaller hospitals in the region, and it will play an increasingly important role in training new doctors from the School of Rural Medicine at the University of New England in Armidale. When The Nationals' magical mystery bus tour arrived in Tamworth last week local people were interested in why these members of Parliament were driving across the State visiting various communities instead of being in their electorates and working for the people who elected them. By lunchtime, the Leader of The Nationals and Trevor Khan had made the reason for their visit very clear: They were coming to tell Tamworth residents that the Coalition was no longer committed to redeveloping Tamworth hospital but instead was going to form a task force that could, yet again, re-examine the need for an upgraded hospital. I was very pleased to receive a letter from the shadow Minister for Health dated 19 August 2008, stating:

We are fully committed to delivering the long promised Tamworth hospital, and to this end have committed making it a priority for Coalition Government.

She re-confirmed that commitment in a letter to the member for Northern Tablelands as recently as 23 March this year. It appeared there was consensus from all political parties that the Tamworth hospital redevelopment would take place, and I considered it a bonus that the Coalition identified it as a priority. The Leader of The Nationals, the duty member of the Legislative Council for Tamworth, Trevor Khan, and the other parliamentarians stand condemned for abandoning the people of Tamworth. By walking away from the commitment and forming another task force The Nationals have ignored all the work already done, and they have deserted the people of the New England and north-west. Federal member of Parliament, Tony Windsor, has described this farce of a task force as blatantly placing a genuine health campaigner, Ann Jacob, in the middle of a political agenda. Mr Windsor also said that it is another example of The Nationals choosing a local victim for their perverse political gain, and that it does not address the real needs of the people of the region.

The greatest insult to country people has been the blatant hypocrisy and the complete lack of ethics displayed by The Nationals on the hospital redevelopment debate. They have manipulated the situation, constantly undermined confidence in the project and instilled fear into health workers and their families through their constant criticisms—all without providing any answers to the challenges. A fancy slogan—"The New South Wales Nationals Start the Change Regional Tour"—and a bus covered in Andrew Stoner's photograph

that drives up and down the streets of country towns, combined with a few state-the-obvious motherhood statements, are not what people are looking for in an alternative government. In one regional community members of The Nationals did not even bother to get out of the bus except for a very quick photo opportunity.

Urgent work is required at Tamworth hospital to provide modern maternity accommodation. We need to progress the community's calls for radiotherapy treatment to be made accessible in Tamworth so cancer patients do not have to travel so far for treatment. Instead, The Nationals have tried to manipulate local people. The party seems to lack policy, direction and vision. It is interesting to examine the record of The Nationals' duty member of the Legislative Council, Trevor Khan, on the redevelopment of Tamworth hospital. Since I received the letter from the shadow health Minister dated 19 August 2008, Mr Khan has put out more than 20 media releases on this subject. It is fascinating to look back. On 29 August 2008, in one of his media releases headed, "Iemma Must Honour Promise On Tamworth hospital", Trevor Khan said, "We need our hospital now." On 19 September 2008 the Leader of The Nationals, Trevor Khan and Jenny Gardiner launched the Tamworth hospital online petition. Trevor Khan said that the Tamworth hospital redevelopment was a major issue of importance to the people of the region. He said:

Tamworth, this is your hospital. It is time to get behind it, logon, sign the petition and show your support.

The community response to the petition was well documented by Mr Khan. On 26 September 2008 there were 500 signatures on the Help Our Hospital website—and counting. Mr Khan said, "I say to the Premier Nathan Rees, ignore the people of Tamworth at your peril." The website contains a commentary on the issue: 30 September, 1,000 signatures, and counting; 14 October, critical mass—2,000 signatories on the Help Our Hospital petition; 29 October, Tamworth hospital redevelopment still on the chopping block; 11 November, delay may be fatal; 12 November, uncertainty over hospital redevelopment must end; 19 November, axe looms over Tamworth hospital redevelopment; 4 December, Premier refuses to fund hospital redevelopment; 5 December, launch of the online health survey; and 17 December, Tamworth health services plan missing in action. The new year saw more of the same: 6 January, health survey results roll in. In an example of just how callous and manipulative this process has been, Mr Khan is quoted as saying:

I realise that it is very difficult for people to share their stories of personal grief and heartbreak, but their willingness to do so is most helpful in assisting in the development of good public health policy. The responses to date have been invaluable and will be passed on to the relevant Shadow Ministers to assist in the further refining of New South Wales Liberal/Nationals Coalition policy in the lead up to the next state election in March 2011.

The policy is to abandon the hospital and to form a task force. The campaign of deceit continued. The website commentary states: 12 January, Maitland miscarriage drama—ramifications for Tamworth; 29 January, Rees must meet his Tamworth hospital commitment regardless of Federal funding decisions; 2 February, Tamworth's maternity ward plight championed; 26 February, health services plan still not finalised; and 1 April, still no release date for Tamworth health services plan. After all of this hysteria and manipulation, on 30 April Andrew Stoner and Trevor Khan announced that they were going to form yet another task force to guide the Coalition's approach to the future service and facility needs of the Tamworth hospital.

What a blatant disregard for our community's needs and what a kick in the teeth for local residents! Someone has forgotten to tell them that they have already had a health task force that visited Tamworth. That task force has already spoken to the clinicians, residents, doctors, nurses, volunteers and patients about redeveloping the hospital. I call on all Nationals members to rethink this new position urgently and to guarantee that the Tamworth hospital redevelopment, complete with much-needed radiotherapy services, will proceed in the first term of any future Coalition government.

Yesterday I heard Leader of The Nationals on ABC radio saying that the redevelopment would now happen—yet another backflip—if his party could rebuild trust with the community. In other words, they will get a hospital if they vote for The Nationals. That is blatant bribery. Given the conversations I have had with people who rang me outraged at those comments, they should be withdrawn. I agree with Tony Windsor that the people deserve a great deal better. The Nationals should apologise to everyone who signed the online petition and recommit to the hospital redevelopment. That would be a really good start to rejoining this debate in a positive way.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [11.54 a.m.]: "In the end, improving patient care is why we all get out of bed every morning." They are the words of a clinician during a Garling inquiry hearing. That attitude is demonstrated at Tamworth hospital more than in many other hospitals in the State. I pay tribute to the staff of Tamworth hospital for the work they have done and will do. It is always a major challenge to work in a base hospital, and especially to implement new technologies. We have no hands but the dedicated staff at Tamworth hospital. The medical school facility at the hospital is extremely exciting. It

has 120 medical students at the moment and has an annual intake of 60 students. Those students are the future of our profession and they are lucky to be at the University of New England. We are all looking forward to their continued learning and their contribution to rural health.

The Tamworth hospital issue highlights the Opposition split and the state of the shotgun marriage between the high Tories and the rural Socialists. Last week when the leader of The Nationals visited Tamworth he backflipped on the Coalition's commitment, probably because he was not aware of it. The *Northern Daily Leader*, which has always been tough on The Nationals, had a front-page headline: "BACKFLIP: Nats ditch hospital pledge". The article states:

As of yesterday ... the Nationals are now only committed to developing a plan.

Mr Stoner stopped short of committing to a timeframe for when the redevelopment might commence ... how much it might cost ... or what it would include.

I suspect that he was distracted by the DVD being played on his magic bus. They were probably watching *Little Miss Sunshine*, which tells the story of a disastrous bus trip around America. I recommend it to The Nationals, but they have probably already seen it. We have seen a 180-degree change in direction from The Nationals this week. Now they would build a hospital, but on one condition; that is, that they win the trust of the people of Tamworth. What does that mean? It sounds like a veiled threat to the people of Tamworth. The Nationals' policy changes by the day. The Coalition has produced a two-point health plan. The major policy is to expand the number of area health services from eight to 20. They say that that would help the area health services pay their bills. It will not.

Mr Andrew Constance: Point of order: The Minister is clearly misleading the House about Liberal Party policy. He knows full well that we are not going to scrap area health services. The standing orders state that members should not mislead the House. That statement is offensive. He should be very clear about our policy and not seek to mislead the House. I am also interested to hear about Labor's position in respect of Tamworth hospital given that it has been in government for 14 years.

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

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: The Opposition's policy appears to involve increasing the number of health services from eight to 20 and renaming them health clusters. There will be 20 chief executives, 20 accounts departments, 20 teams of office support staff, 20 offices throughout the State and 20 boards. That is a return to the formula that gave us the problems at Campbelltown. It would have a serious adverse effect on rural health, which needs networking. Networking is the future of health care. The recurrent cost of the extra 12 health services would be \$300 million a year. To my knowledge, The Nationals have not set out which hospitals would go where. Good luck! I have a copy of "Making it up"—I mean, "Making it Work"—The Nationals' policy. However, it does not contain a map indicating which hospital will go where. It will be a most interesting exercise. The Nationals' changes would not pay a single creditor and, most importantly, would not treat a single patient.

The 2008 mini-budget did change the timeframes for a number of capital health projects and times are tough. The global financial crisis is the greatest crisis we have had to deal with since the Depression. However, the New South Wales Government continues with its significant health capital program. Since 2003 the New South Wales Government has completed more than 600 major health capital projects at a cost of more than \$2.1 billion. Liverpool Hospital gets bigger every week. I am looking forward to the new concrete pour—I check it every week. This Government has rebuilt virtually every major hospital and emergency department in the State. One project now underway is one of the largest health capital projects in Australia's history. The \$1 billion Royal North Shore Hospital will become one of the finest new hospitals in the world and will remain a centre of excellence for the entire State, including the North Coast, which sends many patients to that facility.

While the Opposition backtracks, the Government has been clear: It will invest in Tamworth. The Premier has given his commitment that the project will commence in this term of government. This is an undertaking from a Government that has built or rebuilt every major hospital and emergency department in the State and has a track record of delivering major projects versus an Opposition that originally attacked the Government for planning the project, then matched its commitments, then committed to planning and then promised to build the hospital. The Liberals policy, Making It Work, is now known in the health system as Making It Up. Tamworth is not even mentioned in that document. I hope that the Coalition's commitment is not like one of Mr Howard's non-core promises. It is a plan to increase the health bureaucracy—not one more doctor, not one more nurse, but more money on bureaucrats and no track record of improving the health of the

people of New South Wales. That is why the people of Tamworth have consistently rejected The Nationals in favour of progressive Independents such as Mr Draper and Mr Windsor, and have done so for generations. One of the truisms of politics is that the electorate always gets it right.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI (Murrumbidgee—Deputy Leader of The Nationals) [12.01 p.m.]: I move:

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

- (2) acknowledges the comments by the Leader of The Nationals in the *Northern Daily Leader* of 5 April 2009 that: "The Coalition's commitment to the project was 100% and that come the election a comprehensive plan would be in place on how this could be achieved"; and
- (3) acknowledges the commitment by The Nationals/Liberals to Tamworth as printed in the *Northern Daily Leader* of 6 April 2009 that: "The Liberal/National Coalition yesterday announced it was 100% committed to a fully costed redevelopment of Tamworth Hospital should it win the next State election".

Members may wonder why I am making my contribution to the debate from this side of the House: I will always speak on the opposite side of the Chamber to those who are campaigning for the re-election of the Labor Government in New South Wales. That is what the member for Tamworth has been doing for the six years he has been a member of Parliament. We have seen that particularly in the past couple of weeks. The member for Tamworth has been critical of The Nationals and the Coalition over the past couple of weeks.

Mr Thomas George: Couple of weeks? The past 10 years.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: Particularly over the past couple of weeks, but not one word has been said about the Labor Party over the past couple of weeks—not one word. Yet when Morris Iemma was Premier he went to Tamworth and said, "We will build a new hospital in Tamworth." That was the commitment prior to the last State election, but has the member for Tamworth ever criticised Labor for not delivering on that promise? When the Parliamentary Secretary for Health addressed the House it was seven minutes before he referred to the redevelopment of the Tamworth Hospital. All he said was, "We are going to invest in Tamworth," which is code for, "We are not going to do anything." Labor knows it cannot win the seat of Tamworth at the next election. Its vote in Tamworth was about 10 per cent—

Mr Peter Draper: It was 8 per cent.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: It was 8 per cent at the last election. That is why Labor will not build the hospital in Tamworth. The member for Tamworth is a nice bloke, but he is campaigning for the re-election of the Labor Government. All he has done for two weeks is criticise The Nationals. I have looked at his website, where he posts his press releases. Almost every single one of them criticises The Nationals, criticises the Liberal Party, condemns Jillian Skinner and condemns Andrew Stoner—it condemns anybody who is involved with the Liberals or The Nationals. It never once condemns the Labor Party for any of its failures in Tamworth. If there is ever a failure, it is the failure to deliver this hospital in Tamworth as promised by former Premier Morris Iemma. Yet there is never one word of criticism of the Labor Party. That says to me that the member for Tamworth is campaigning for re-election of the Labor Party in New South Wales. We have seen what that party has done in New South Wales. I have a question for the member for Tamworth: Will you build the hospital in Tamworth? You are asking The Nationals, the Liberal Party and the Labor Party. Will you build it?

Mr Peter Draper: I am not a bricklayer.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: You are asking everybody else. I am asking you: Will you build the hospital in Tamworth?

Mr David Harris: Point of order: The member for Murrumbidgee is directing his comments across the Chamber when he should direct them through the chair. He is also being argumentative.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! I uphold the point of order. The member for Murrumbidgee will direct his comments through the Chair.

Mr ADRIAN PICCOLI: The member for Tamworth cannot build a hospital in Tamworth. Only a Coalition government can build the hospital in 2011. That is the bottom line. It is easy for the member for Tamworth to say, "Here is \$330 million. Here is \$370 million", but only a Coalition government in 2011 can build that hospital. I can understand why unaligned members such as the member for Tamworth are getting so

upset. The well-known and well-regarded Auditor-General reported that Independent members only get \$1 from the State Government for every \$1.30 the Government spends in Coalition seats. They are not getting as much money as are seats held by The Nationals, and they are very upset about it.

Mr PETER DRAPER (Tamworth) [12.06 p.m.], in reply: That was fantastic! I have never heard anything quite as exaggerated or ridiculous in my life. I am very much looking forward to the construction of the Tamworth Hospital. Having met again with the Premier yesterday and received advice, I am looking forward to construction starting in this term of Parliament, as has been promised by two successive Premiers. The hypocrisy of The Nationals, which was on exhibition again, is amazing. They are trying to insinuate that Independent members do not receive funding from the Government and that the Coalition is somehow this magnet for attracting money. I succeeded a member of The Nationals in this House. Due to his hard work our electorate received \$9 million in the budget. That was fantastic! The member for Murrumbidgee will be interested to know that we have gone from \$9 million to \$18 million, to \$35 million, to \$67 million, to \$82 million, and to \$129 million last year. This year I am looking forward to an even further increase.

It is called working hard for your community. It is knocking on Minister's doors, securing commitments to build new things. We have a brand-new school. Last week I had the honour of turning the sod for the new school for disabilities in Tamworth—a \$8.1 million investment in people with disabilities. The plan of the department originally was to build six classrooms. We are not getting six—we are getting eight—and that came about through some very effective lobbying and an investment of another \$8 million in our local community to provide opportunities for young people with disabilities. The hypocrisy of The Nationals continues. I am yet to be convinced by any utterances coming from the mouth of the Leader of The Nationals, because they simply cannot be believed. The man backflips and flip-flops from one extreme position to another. He drives around country communities in that moving billboard, that great big white and green bus. When it first drove into Fitzroy Street, Tamworth it parked in the taxi rank in front of my office.

What sort of respect for the community is on display from this wonderful bunch of individuals who clearly have no interest in country communities? If they had an interest in country communities they would not need a bus; they would headquarter their office in country New South Wales instead of in Carrington Street in Sydney. This has been going on for years. There is continued hypocrisy, particularly by the local upper House member the Hon. Trevor Khan, who is doing a magnificent job of destabilising the community, putting fear into all of the workers in the Tamworth health system. I have had wives and children and other people coming into my office extremely upset by the instability that the Hon. Trevor Khan is creating. If he thinks it is a way of campaigning and being productive he can go right ahead, but I do not think he has any understanding of the ramifications of his current stance. The Nationals stand condemned for walking away from this hospital. I do not believe the utterances coming from the Leader of The Nationals, nor does the community. It is an absolute disgrace. I highly commend the motion to the House.

Question—That the words stand—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 52

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 Besseling	Ms Hay	Mr Pearce
Mr Borger	Mr Hickey	Mrs Perry
Mr Brown	Ms Hornery	Mr Piper
Ms Burton	Ms Judge	Mr Sartor
Mr Campbell	Ms Keneally	Mr Shearan
Mr Coombs	Mr Khoshaba	Mr Stewart
Mr Corrigan	Mr Koperberg	Ms Tebbutt
Mr Costa	Mr Lalich	Mr Terenzini
Mr Daley	Mr Lynch	Mr West
Ms D'Amore	Mr McBride	Mr Whan
Mr Draper	Dr McDonald	
Mrs Fardell	Ms McKay	<i>Tellers,</i>
Ms Firth	Mr McLeay	Mr Ashton
Mr Furolo	Ms McMahan	Mr Martin

Noes, 34

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

Pair

Ms Burney

Mr Kerr

Question resolved in the affirmative.**Amendment negatived.****Motion agreed to.****LIVERPOOL ELECTORATE CANDIDATE DISCLOSURE**

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool—Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) [12.18 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that Nader Mannoun was a Liberal Party candidate for the electorate of Liverpool in 2007;
- (2) notes that Mr Mannoun failed to appropriately declare his use of rent-free premises as campaign rooms;
- (3) notes that these rent-free campaign rooms were provided by a local hotel; and
- (4) condemns the failure of Mr Mannoun to be honest with the people of Liverpool.

There is an immense temptation when a motion such as this comes before this House for all the behaviour for which this Chamber is notorious to be on display. That would be regrettable in this debate, because this is an important issue, and it is important for a number of reasons. Firstly, it goes to the trust between a candidate and the electorate of Liverpool. Mr Mannoun has let Liverpool down by not telling the truth. The issue goes to serious probity concerns. Mr Mannoun received an undeclared benefit from a local business but lost at the State election; nonetheless he was elected to Liverpool City Council at the 2008 election. And, because councillors determine development applications, there are more events that have potential probity issues for councillors than there are for State members of Parliament. Probity concerns relate not to what Mr Mannoun might do as an unsuccessful State candidate but to what he might do as a councillor. The issue also goes to a pattern of behaviour—not being frank seems characteristic of Mr Mannoun's behaviour in a broader sense.

In the 2007 State election Mr Mannoun had a campaign office located at 257 Macquarie Street, Liverpool. This is one of the best-known streets in the Liverpool central business district, and historically it has been Liverpool's main street. The office operated as Mr Mannoun's campaign office during February and March 2007. It was a prominent location, with a light box out the front proclaiming his name and party affiliation. The office was opened with some fanfare, with his media spin proudly proclaiming that this was the first time in decades his political party—or at least the party he was a member of at that time—had had a campaign office in Liverpool. That bit, at least, was honest.

The location of Mr Mannoun's campaign office is made even more significant because the very small number of issues he raised during that election campaign seem to be related to Liverpool's central business district. I might add that many issues seemed to be related to council rather than State Government. His office

was not just a campaign office; it was, because of its location, a significant part of his campaign. That is, it was the centre of that small part of the electorate that he campaigned about. When his electoral funding form was finally lodged it contained no reference to the payment of rent for these premises. No reference was made to his having received rent-free premises. It strikes me as extraordinary that such a central element of his campaign was ignored. It was simply not dealt with in his disclosure. [*Quorum called for.*]

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

There seems to be a pattern of behaviour on the part of Mr Mannoun. In 2005 he ran in the by-election for Werriwa. He filed a declaration in relation to that by-election: his declaration was dated 1 July 2005. That declaration exposed expenditure of \$10,532.50, with income by way of donations at \$3,500, leaving a shortfall of \$7,000.

Mr Chris Hartcher: Point of order: This motion is specific in its wording. It relates to the campaign office and to the 2007 election campaign. The member for Liverpool is now well outside the leave of his motion. He is addressing issues that occurred prior to the date to which it refers and issues that do not relate to a campaign office. Mr Acting-Speaker, I ask you, as you are so often asked and have so often ruled, to direct the member for Liverpool to return to the terms of the motion he has moved.

Mr PAUL LYNCH: To the point of order: The member for Terrigal, regrettably, has not read the motion. He should read paragraph (4). It would help if he engaged his mind before he next takes a point of order.

Mr Chris Hartcher: Further to the point of order: Paragraph (4) of the motion relates to paragraphs (2) and (3), which precede it. It relates to an allegation of dishonesty in respect of paragraphs (2) and (3). It does not open a general debate. This is not a matter of general debate; it is a matter relating to a specific motion.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! The comments of the Minister are within the leave of the motion.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: There is a long-held convention in this House that when a member seeks to attack a non-member of this House—that is, a person who has no right to defend himself or herself—the Speaker will interpret whatever motion seeks to delineate the issue in a very narrow way. It clearly is not a matter where a member has ever sought to provide a broad-based attack on someone who has no right to come before this Chamber to defend himself or herself. I ask you to reconsider the ruling you have just made and to direct the member to define his debate in narrow terms, accepting that the motion refers to someone who is not a member and cannot defend himself.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! I will take advice from the Clerks. In the meantime, the Minister may continue.

Mr PAUL LYNCH: There is a shortfall of \$7,000 in the 2005 declaration, which Mr Mannoun should explain. In addition to that, he ran in the council election. We have an issue about whether he has filed electoral returns.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: The member has a history in this place of these sorts of attacks—

Mr Alan Ashton: Hardly relevant.

Mr Brad Hazzard: You remember it.

Mr Alan Ashton: I remember it.

Mr Brad Hazzard: The attacks he made in his inaugural speech are illustrative of the way he has conducted himself for his entire time in this place. It is important that you interpret how he should carry himself in this debate. The member needs guidance, and I ask you to give him guidance.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! There is no point of order. The Minister has the call.

Mr PAUL LYNCH: Mr Mannoun ran in the council election. Other councillors have complained to me that he has not lodged his electoral declarations, as he was required to do by 25 February this year. Certainly if one checks the Electoral Funding Authority website one will find that Mr Mannoun has not filed those documents.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order—

Mr PAUL LYNCH: I am happy to place upon the table the search from the Electoral Funding Authority.

Mr Brad Hazzard: I withdraw the point of order.

Mr PAUL LYNCH: There may well be an innocent explanation for it. I am happy for Mr Mannoun to give us an explanation.

Mr Chris Hartcher: Point of order: The document the member alleges to have tabled relates to the 2008 council elections. It does not relate to his motion, which refers to the 2007 State election in the seat of Liverpool. The member is outside the terms of his own motion. Mr Acting-Speaker, earlier you allowed the Minister to continue on the basis that his remarks related to matters prior to the 2007 State election. But the Minister is now referring to a matter that occurred subsequent to the 2007 State election. He is engaging in a wide-ranging debate. He has used a person's name, Ned Mannoun, and he now seeks to raise various matters about that person that have nothing to do with the terms of his motion.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Matthew Morris): Order! A degree of latitude is extended to members when they move their motions. The Minister has the call.

Mr PAUL LYNCH: I find it extraordinary that such a cacophony of points of order are being taken. One would assume that there is something desperate that the Opposition wishes to stop talking about. Clearly, Opposition members are frightened of what is being discussed. They are desperate to prevent this discussion occurring. The question must be asked: What on earth are they trying to hide? One assumes it relates precisely to the honesty and probity of one of their candidates.

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: Perhaps the Minister could speak with a truthful tongue—as opposed to what he normally does when he makes up stories about anybody and everybody.

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

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER (Terrigal) [12.28 p.m.]: Let me recount the facts. The member for Liverpool has moved a motion in relation to the 2007 State election, at which his seat was contested by Ned Mannoun, who is now an elected councillor on Liverpool City Council. Mr Mannoun filed an election funding return in accordance with the Act. The election funding return failed to state that he had the rented office in Liverpool for his campaign. An amended return was subsequently filed on 9 May 2008—almost a year ago. We are now debating an amended election funding return for the electorate of Liverpool one year after the event. A Minister of the Crown with responsibility for ageing and disability is wasting the time of the House. He does not speak about any of the matters in his portfolio; he speaks about an election funding return of someone who had the temerity to stand against him in the 2007 State election. I move that the motion be amended as follows:

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

this House:

- (1) notes that Nader Mannoun's opponent at the 2007 State election was Paul Lynch;
- (2) notes that Nader Mannoun was Liberal candidate for the South Ward of Liverpool Council in 2008;
- (3) further notes that Nader Mannoun was elected by the people of Liverpool to the council, a sign of the confidence placed in him by the voters of Liverpool; and
- (4) calls on the member for Liverpool to ensure that all donations to political parties are properly disclosed and that public assets are not used for political purposes.

In support of paragraph (4) of the amendment I draw the attention of the House to matters that have previously been raised in this Chamber by members who have failed to file the appropriate return, including the \$160,000 that the member for Wollongong accidentally omitted from her return.

Mr Andrew Constance: How much?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Only \$160,000. That was never the subject of any motion by the member for Liverpool or the subject of any discussion, yet it has been discussed in this House. Questions have been asked about it in this House—

Mr Alan Ashton: Point of order—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The member for East Hills rises on a point of order. Who is he trying to protect?

Mr Alan Ashton: As you defended the David Clarke trained faction.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order!

Mr Alan Ashton: The member for Wollongong is not mentioned in any motion here today. It is ancient history. The member for Terrigal knows that it has nothing to do with this debate. Let us talk about Ned Mannoun, which faction he is in within the Liberal Party, what seat he is hoping to run for next time and what his real name is. Then we can talk about other matters if the member for Terrigal wants to put them on the business paper. The member's remarks are totally out of order.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! I uphold the point of order. The member for Terrigal will confine his remarks to the motion.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am speaking to my amendment.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! I have not seen the amendment.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The member for Wollongong failed to disclose \$160,000 and there is a pattern of deceit of the Australian Labor Party at the 2007 State election with not a single word from the member for Liverpool. The amendment also relates to another significant issue in relation to the member for Liverpool: it asks the member for Liverpool to ensure that public assets are not used for political purposes. There is one major public asset that we are all very familiar with: the housing commission list. There are tens of thousands of people in New South Wales housed by the housing commission and to get on the housing commission list one has to go through a proper and appropriate procedure. Yet allegations that people have been allowed to improperly jump the housing commission queue have been raised in this House. In 1997 such allegations were raised in this House in respect of the member for Liverpool, allegations that the Minister was rorting the housing commission list for his own electoral purposes.

Mr Paul Lynch: Point of order: Notwithstanding the cute line of dishonesty and lies that the member of Terrigal has, if he wishes to proceed that way against me he needs to move a substantive motion, which he has not done. He will not do that because he knows there is no substance to those allegations and the person who made those allegations—who is now a close friend of members opposite—Sam Bargshoon, has withdrawn all the allegations. The only time you can believe anything said by the people making those allegations is when they are admitting they are telling lies.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Is the Minister speaking to the point of order or is he speaking in reply to the debate?

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! I uphold the point of order. Members who wish to attack another member must do so by way of substantive motion.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: The member of Liverpool has raised an interesting name: Sam Bargshoon. I knew you would and I thank you for it. Sam Bargshoon gave evidence in the Orange Grove inquiry that he—and there were statutory declarations and sworn evidence by Sam Bargshoon—and the member for Liverpool went around to people's homes to rort the attendance book of Australian Labor Party branches—

Mr Paul Lynch: Point of order: That is a lie. The member for Terrigal is a liar. If you want to look at the evidence—

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! I call the Minister for Ageing to order.

Mr Paul Lynch: If you look at the evidence that Sam Bargshoon gave to the upper House inquiry you will find that he admitted he lied about me. I would suggest that you check the evidence. I know he is now in your pocket but the problem is that when you propped him up as a witness on Orange Grove he recanted on all of the stuff that you wanted him to say. I might add—

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I am sure you would like more about how you took the attendance book—

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! The Minister for Ageing will resume his seat. The debate will proceed in an orderly manner.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: You have to be a member for 12 months and have attended three branch meetings to vote in the preselection ballot. There are often allegations that people take the branch attendance books around to people's homes and say, "Sign here that you were at this particular branch meeting so you can vote in the preselection ballot." The allegation made by Sam Bargshoon to the Orange Grove inquiry was that the Minister rorted the books.

Mr Alan Ashton: Point of order: The amendment moved by the member for Terrigal reads:

this House:

- (1) notes that Nader Mannoun's opponent at the 2007 State election was Paul Lynch;
- (2) notes that Nader Mannoun was Liberal candidate for the South Ward of Liverpool Council in 2008;
- (3) further notes that Nader Mannoun was elected by the people of Liverpool to the council, a sign of the confidence placed in him by the voters of Liverpool; and
- (4) calls on the member for Liverpool to ensure that all donations to political parties are properly disclosed and that public assets are not used for political purposes.

What have the rules of Australian Labor Party got to do with the member for Terrigal talking to either the amendment or the motion?

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: I uphold the point of order. What have Labor Party rules got to do with anything when they are so blatantly rorted by the member for Liverpool? Sam Bargshoon, where are you?

Mr Paul Lynch: On the point of order: I go back to the first point of order I took upon this utterly irrelevant contribution on which the Assistant-Speaker ruled that if the member for Terrigal wants to make an attack on me it must be done by way of substantive motion. The member for Terrigal will not do that because he knows he does not have the evidence to do it, but that does not allow him to breach the standing orders by pursuing it against me now. Accordingly, I ask that the Assistant-Speaker reinforce his ruling and direct the member for Terrigal to adhere to the standing orders or to sit down.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! I remind the member for Terrigal that attacks on other members must be by way of substantive motion. The member for Terrigal has taken similar points of order in the past.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: Absolutely, and I will not mention Sam Bargshoon's name again, until the next time the member for Liverpool and I debate. I will mention, however, the allegations raised about the member for Liverpool on his misuse of the housing commission list—

Mr Paul Lynch: Point of order—

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! I remind the member for Terrigal of my earlier ruling.

Mr Paul Lynch: May I suggest the Serjeant-at-Arms?

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! If the member for Terrigal breaches my ruling again I will take further action.

Mr CHRIS HARTCHER: One thing about debating the member for Liverpool is that there is always a feisty debate, and I enjoy a feisty debate with the member for Liverpool—we are old sparring partners. The issue is integrity in public office, and that is what the member for Liverpool is talking about. The member for Liverpool is talking about a candidate who had the temerity to stand against him in 2007, and did not do too badly, and will stand against him again in 2011, and will do even better. He wants to rubbish that candidate's reputation. That is what this motion is all about. That candidate issued a statement, which was published in the *Sun Herald*, over a year ago, as follows:

While not defending the oversight, the failure to declare the campaign office can in no way be compared with Ms Noreen Hay, Parliamentary Secretary, the Minister for Health and the member for Wollongong. Ms Hay altered her declaration after being contacted by the ICAC corruption investigation involving Labor councillors in Wollongong.

Did I mention the Independent Commission Against Corruption? The Independent Commission Against Corruption was going to investigate the member for Liverpool. [*Time expired.*]

Mr ALAN ASHTON (East Hills) [12.38 p.m.]: How long will it be before I am interrupted? The Opposition should remember that the standing orders do not allow vexatious points of order. I do not know the case of Mr Nader "Ned" Mannoun well—

Mr Chris Hartcher: So why are you talking about him?

Mr ALAN ASHTON: I said I do not know him well. Obviously, the member for Terrigal knows him very well. He is probably a Clarkeite, and that is why the member for Terrigal has an interest in this regard. I am aware of several pieces of information about Mr Mannoun. I first heard of him whilst watching one of those television programs of such great credibility that are shown by Channel 7 or Channel 9 at 6.30 p.m. As I recall, this character was walking up and down the streets of Liverpool talking to people about the terrible crime incidents in the area and indicating that he should be elected to the seat of Liverpool. It was later revealed by Mick Plotecki, who, I believe, was the superintendent at the time, when he produced all the facts and figures, that crime was at its lowest level ever. That did not stop Ned Mannoun running a campaign on crime, going to all his mates in the local shopping centre saying that crime was out of control and laying it at the feet of the member for Liverpool, Paul Lynch. I raise an issue about people who join political parties, which has happened in my electorate and other electorates. If people join a political party one of the best things they can do is stay in it. I understand that Mr Mannoun joined the Australian Labor Party, but when he found out there was no way—

Mr Chris Hartcher: Point of order—

Mr ALAN ASHTON: Why does the member for Terrigal raise a point of order? It is a fact.

Mr Chris Hartcher: I take the point of order that was raised earlier by the member for East Hills that neither the motion nor the amendment deal with the Australian Labor Party, the rules of the Australian Labor Party or political parties. If it was good enough for the member for East Hills to raise that point of order—which was upheld, as I knew it would be—it is good enough for me to raise it against the member.

Mr ALAN ASHTON: I will refer to documents, which I am prepared to table. In the "Naked Eye" column of the *Sun-Herald* Kerry-Ann Walsh and Lisa Carty wrote:

Former watch repairer Ned Mannoun obviously has an eye for detail, but the defeated Liberal candidate in the safe Labor seat of Liverpool at last year's state election has overlooked something rather important.

He failed to declare a donation of a campaign office in his electoral return. The article continued:

Mr Mannoun forgot to report his use of a prominent office in Liverpool's George Street. After saying he couldn't recall the details of the office arrangement, he promised to refresh his memory and call us back. He didn't.

The article goes on about why he did not call back. Then Mr Mannoun corrected the oversight after it was brought to the attention of the New South Wales Electoral Commission. The *Daily Telegraph* on 2 March 2007 stated:

Meanwhile, it was revealed yesterday an Islamic youth group under investigation by the federal police was invited to attend a Liberal Party fundraiser to be attended by Attorney-General Philip Ruddock.

Candidate Ned Mannoun invited members of the Global Islamic Youth Centre, whose premises were raided last month by police.

That is the same mob that chose that young bloke with the very funny beard who preaches about jihad and war. Ned Mannoun is happy to deal with those people.

Mr Chris Hartcher: Point of order: Is the member for East Hills being racist? Is the member for East Hills attacking people for their religious views? If the member for East Hills is going to be a racist—

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! The member for Terrigal knows that is not a point of order.

Mr ALAN ASHTON: The Liberals may have supported the election of this man to the Liverpool City Council, but in a letter in the *Liverpool City Champion* of Wednesday 14 March 2007 a man from Hinchinbrook, whose name is published—

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order—

Mr ALAN ASHTON: It says, "This group is apparently under investigation—

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! The member for East Hills is out of order.

Mr Brad Hazzard: The member for East Hills started his speech by saying that he did not know anything about Mr Mannoun. He now seeks to read onto the record or table a document the substance of which he cannot verify. Further, he is indicating a clear propensity for racism, which I am surprised about. I would not have expected the member for East Hills to be so silly. I ask that the member verify any documents he seeks to table.

Mr ALAN ASHTON: I am happy to do that. [*Time expired.*]

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE (Bega) [12.43 p.m.]: That was an extraordinary speech from the member for East Hills. He should be very careful talking about terrorism.

Mr Alan Ashton: Point of order: At no point did I talk about terrorism or racism. I was reading from newspaper articles, which I clearly identified, and the member for Bega knows it.

Mr Chris Hartcher: You were being racist.

Mr Alan Ashton: For anyone to call me racist compared with you blokes, particularly you, Chris—

Mr Chris Hartcher: What a disgrace to attack people for their religious beliefs.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! The member for East Hills and the member for Terrigal will cease interjecting. If they do not do so, I will have to have them removed from the Chamber.

Mr Alan Ashton: I ask that the member for Terrigal withdraw those comments. I demand a withdrawal.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! If the member for Terrigal does not come to order I will have him removed from the Chamber.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: That was an extraordinary outburst from the member for East Hills. The member for Liverpool, who is also the Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs, moved the motion. I note that there is not one motion on the Notice Paper in relation to his portfolio responsibilities. The Minister has moved this motion, yet under the \$80 million Younger People in Residential Aged Care Program the Government has relocated only four people in two years.

Mr Alan Ashton: Point of order: We are talking about the probity of electoral matters, not disability services. The member for Bega, who is the shadow Minister for Disability Services, cannot introduce those issues in this debate.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: What is the point of order?

Mr Alan Ashton: Of course it is a point of order.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! The member for East Hills will resume his seat. The House is debating a motion and an amendment to the motion. A number of points of order have been taken because members have not confined their remarks to the leave of the motion and the amendment to the motion. The member for Bega will confine his remarks.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: To the point of order: I am entitled to put that the Minister has moved this motion when there are more serious issues facing the people of New South Wales to do with disability services, ageing and Aboriginal affairs. I am perfectly entitled as a member to make that point. It is not outside the leave of the motion. I am highlighting the fact that the Minister does not understand the important issues in this State. I am also disappointed, flabbergasted actually, that he would start attacking members of the Liberal Party in this way. He does so for one of two reasons: either he is concerned about the effectiveness of the individual concerned or he does not have anything better to do with his time. I would say he does have better things to do, in light of the fact that the portfolio responsibilities he is charged with are in absolute crisis around the State. It is disappointing that the Minister has not seen fit to talk about the level of services in his electorate.

Mr Alan Ashton: Point of order: He may be a slow learner, but the ruling was very clear. The member for Bega is completely ignoring the ruling. The Government may have to move that the member be not further heard.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! I have already ruled that attacks on other members must be by way of substantive motion. If the member for Bega does not adhere to the standing orders I will sit him down.

Mr ANDREW CONSTANCE: The Chair has an incredible style. I endorse the amendments that have been moved by the member for Terrigal. Paragraph (4) of the amendment is particularly pertinent to the member for Liverpool:

- (4) calls on the member for Liverpool to ensure that all donations to political parties are properly disclosed and that public assets are not used for political purposes.

That would explain the *Sydney Morning Herald* article about the public housing list and the way in which the member for Liverpool used it. I also point out that it goes to the heart of the Labor Party in this State in the way in which its members, such as the member for Wollongong, conduct their affairs. It is all very well to have a motion about a campaign office, but what about the \$160,000 for which the Minister failed to move a motion? If he is so concerned about electoral returns—[*Time expired.*]

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [12.48 p.m.]: I have only met Ned Mannoun once, but, I must admit, he seems to be a nice enough chap. Even though he is on Liverpool council he must go to community meetings and functions different to the ones I attend, although I see many of the other councillors, especially the Independents—whom I admire and respect—around the traps. I cannot understand why anyone who has lived in Liverpool would ever leave the Australian Labor Party to join the Libs. They have never done our people in south-western Sydney any favours and never will. Look at Liverpool Hospital, built and extended by Labor governments, as an example of what can happen. My great grandfather, my grandfather and his brothers, who grew up in Liverpool in the early 1900s, and who are buried there, were all diehard Labor men.

Mr Andrew Constance: Point of order: Mr Assistant-Speaker, given the way in which you have just ruled on the points of order against me, what is your response to the member for Macquarie Fields—?

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! Is the member for Bega challenging my ruling?

Mrs Shelley Hancock: He is quoting you.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! He is not quoting me.

Mr Andrew Constance: He is talking about his grandfather. He should keep his contribution in context.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! Is the member making a passing reference?

Mr Andrew Constance: I am raising a point of order.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! I have heard enough on the point of order. The member for Bega will resume his seat.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD: Being a politician is very difficult because there is so much to learn. I am only relatively new to the game, so I am not in a position to give Ned any detailed advice, but I can tell him one thing that he probably knew before the election: If it seems to good to be true, it probably is. The expense saved by the use of a so-called "free" office is considerable and would have been discussed at length in Liberal campaign meetings. I was unable to have an office in my campaign for the 2007 election because we did not have the money. The lack of a campaign office was discussed at length in my campaign meetings, as a campaign office was and is seen as a considerable electoral advantage. The failure to declare this considerable expense cannot be justified as simply an "oversight", especially since Ned failed to return the media calls when he was outed.

When a person enters politics he or she comes under great scrutiny. That scrutiny is closest in local government. Decisions are made in every meeting that directly affect people's homes and finances. As a councillor the one thing that has to be above question at all times is financial and personal integrity. As the member for Terrigal said, there must be integrity in public office. If that integrity is questioned every decision that is made will be second-guessed forever: Was there a hidden influence in that decision that has not been declared?

The refusal to disclose the rent-free use of an office in Liverpool's main street for two months is an issue that will haunt Ned for the rest of his political career. It is no secret that he is using his time on the council as a springboard for higher office. There has been no apology, no remorse and no statement that he will comply with the rules in future campaigns. Instead, there has been a campaign of defence by those opposite for this behaviour, which they must privately admit is completely unacceptable and not something that they would countenance. Ned will find it very difficult to shake off the moniker of "Dodgy" in his future political career because people do not change, and integrity is everything. I commend the motion to the House.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD (Wakehurst) [12.53 p.m.]: I speak against the motion moved by the member for Liverpool, the Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. Of all the people in this place I find it very hard to refer to him as "the honourable Minister" because his history in this place is such that this sort of motion is all a little bit too expected, a little bit too trite. I am disappointed that the member for East Hills, for whom I have quite a bit of regard, and the member for Macquarie Fields—a medical practitioner—in any way support this motion. It is a motion that demeans all of us in the sense that it is an attack on somebody who was prepared simply to stand up in the democratic process and oppose the Minister in his electorate.

That is what democracy is all about—having somebody who has the courage, the gumption, the preparedness to stand up and offer a democratic choice. Any member in this House could bring the complaint that the Minister has brought to the House if he or she wanted to. A series of Labor members who have been against me from time to time have done things that were not exactly attractive in a political or a perfect sense, but I did not seek to diminish them in the House—I still would not—and I would not name them in the context of this debate because I do not see that it adds anything. To make this sort of attack diminishes us all.

Ed Mannoun is a very decent guy. I campaigned with Ed Mannoun in Liverpool and we went out in the plaza to meet with local residents and talk to the police. He understands the local community in Liverpool and relates well to the people there. He had to hear messages that I am sure he probably did not want to hear: that the local member of Parliament, the member for Liverpool, had not even met with some of these community groups. I well recollect going into the Aboriginal land council—which is only about 150 metres up the road from the office of the member for Liverpool—where we had a most worthwhile meeting with the local land council representatives, but we were stunned to be told that the Minister, despite the fact that he had been the local member for some years at that point, had never crossed the threshold.

Mr Paul Lynch: That's untrue.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: The Minister is saying that is untrue. I do not want to misrepresent the Minister any more than I want to see him misrepresent Ned Mannoun. All I am saying is that that was what was

said to me. Certainly the Minister has the opportunity to rebut that, and I will accept whatever he has to say on that front, because he is a member of Parliament and hopefully what he tells the House will not be misleading. But in this motion the Minister has diminished all of us by attacking Ned Mannoun. Ned Mannoun made a mistake. Many people do, and we often hear about the consequence of mistakes that occur on the Labor Party benches. We heard about the mistake of the member for Wollongong. We have heard also in the case of Ned Mannoun that the issue was formally corrected within months, and more than a year ago now.

Now we have this motion before the House by which the member for Liverpool seeks to diminish Ned Mannoun. Nothing the member for Liverpool does will diminish Ned Mannoun. From when the member came into this place I was disappointed on day one because he sought to use his inaugural speech as an attack. If anybody wants to see whether the credibility of this member stands up in his criticism of other people in this place then they should go back and have a look at the speech he made that day. It was a disappointment to me because at that point I had a belief that we would all show courtesy to each other in our first speeches, that we would have some sense of the culture of this place and an understanding that a new member would not step beyond the boundaries.

The member for Liverpool—who is not so new now—showed from day one that he was quite prepared to attack the then member for Camden on the most spurious grounds. He made a personal and odious attack. I think more than 30 interjections were made during his speech that day. He is probably the only member to achieve that in the history of the New South Wales Parliament. His inaugural speech was a farce. On his first day in this place he attacked Liz Kernohan—who was a very fine member of Parliament—and he has continued such attacks over a decade in the House. He is now attacking somebody who cannot stand up and defend himself in this place, a member of the community. It is extremely disappointing, and the member for East Hills would agree with me privately.

Mr Alan Ashton: Liz was all right.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: Liz was all right, and the member for East Hills probably would agree with everything I am saying now about the member for Liverpool. I ask the Minister to show a little more responsibility in the way he behaves in this place. He has something to contribute but he diminishes himself and he diminishes all of us by these silly attacks on people.

Mr PAUL LYNCH (Liverpool—Minister for Ageing, Minister for Disability Services, and Minister for Aboriginal Affairs) [12.58 p.m.], in reply: I note the eloquent plea of guilty entered by the Opposition in relation to the allegations against Mr Mannoun. The best Opposition members could do was to move an amendment that was substantially unrelated to the motion and to throw up a plethora of smokescreens that were for the most part without substance. Members opposite claimed that this motion was a waste of time. Their hypocrisy is interesting: If they thought it was a waste of time why did they spend so much time taking points of order and contributing to the debate? That is an example of the usual hypocrisy displayed by Opposition members in this place.

It was also said that because I am a Minister I should not be talking about Liverpool. I am certainly a Minister; I am happy to acknowledge that. However, I am also the member for Liverpool. It is a weakness that Ministers sometimes forget that they are still local members. That is not something I am ever likely to forget and I am delighted to be able to move motions in this place in my capacity as the member for Liverpool. Indeed, if some of the members who complained so much had moved motions of their own dealing with ministerial issues they would have slightly more credibility in voicing their complaints about this motion.

The member for Wakehurst does not like me. I am sorry about that. However, I find it extraordinary that he is minimising someone's failure to get his electoral disclosure right. That is the substance of what he said: making sure someone gets his disclosure right diminishes this House. That is an extraordinary proposition. It suggests that he has absolute contempt for political and donation disclosures. It may well be appropriate for him to rethink the position he just put. For the record, I have been to the land council office a number of times. The member for Wakehurst should be very careful about whom he quotes because things have happened that I will not go into here. In fairness to the member for Wakehurst, he does now know about that, but he should be careful.

Mr Chris Hartcher: That is a threat.

Mr PAUL LYNCH: No, it is not a threat; it is a serious suggestion about whom he should rely upon. I thank the members for East Hills and for Macquarie Fields for their contributions. The member for East Hills correctly made the point about the amount of time that Ned Mannoun spent talking about law and order issues. In a sense, that is the greatest hypocrisy of all. Mr Mannoun spent an enormous amount of time telling people that we must adhere to the law and that there was not enough adherence to the law in Liverpool. However, when it came to his own legal responsibility to get the declaration completely right, he got it completely wrong. He put a significant emphasis on law and order throughout the Liverpool campaign. Peter Debnam attended a public forum held in a restaurant at Liverpool—curiously enough, the restaurateur subsequently faced serious criminal charges.

Mr Mannoun also arranged a public meeting in early 2008, again about law and order. Yet again, his fellow organisers also went on to face serious criminal charges. Those points highlight how much emphasis he put on law and order. However, at the end of the day, Mr Mannoun could not manage to adhere to the law himself. There is an essential hypocrisy and dishonesty in that. The member for East Hills also talked about political affiliation. His point was that within three short months in 2005 Mr Mannoun was a member of the Labor Party, ran as an Independent and was a member of the Liberal Party. That is central to the point of this motion and to honesty regarding how candidates present themselves, whether they believe in anything or whether they are putting their name forward simply to get elected.

It demonstrates arrogance and contempt for the electorate not to get electoral funding disclosures correct. It is perhaps appropriate to reiterate two of the points I made when moving this motion relating to the 2005 declaration and the declaration that should have been lodged by 25 February. As I said, there may well be perfectly innocent explanations for the points that I raised. However, in light of the history I think we are entitled to an explanation. I return to the good friend of the member for Terrigal Mr Bargshoon. If he is such a terrible man, the member should explain why Mr Bargshoon was Mr Mannoun's campaign director.

Mr Chris Hartcher: Point of order: I have never met Sam Bargshoon. However, the Minister has met him on many occasions. He knows him only too well.

Mr PAUL LYNCH: Not as well as Nader Mannoun does.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Mr Grant McBride): Order! That is not a point of order.

Question—That the words stand—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 45

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

Noes, 38

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

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

Mr Provest
Mrs Skinner
Mr Smith
Mr Souris
Mr Stokes
Mr Stoner
Mr J. H. Turner
Mr R. W. Turner
Mr J. D. Williams
Mr R. C. Williams
Tellers,
Mr George
Mr Maguire

Pair

Ms Burney

Mr Fraser

Question resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment negatived.

Question—That the motion be agreed to—put.

The House divided.

Ayes, 45

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

Mr Greene
Mr Harris
Ms Hay
Mr Hickey
Ms Hornery
Ms Keneally
Mr Khoshaba
Mr Koperberg
Mr Lalich
Mr Lynch
Mr McBride
Dr McDonald
Ms McKay
Mr McLeay
Ms McMahan
Ms Megarrity

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

Tellers,
Mr Ashton
Mr Martin

Noes, 38

Mr Aplin
Mr Baird
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Mr Besseling
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Mrs Hancock
Mr Hartcher
Mr Hazzard
Ms Hodgkinson
Mrs Hopwood
Mr Humphries
Mr Kerr
Mr Merton
Mr O'Dea
Mr O'Farrell
Mr Page
Mr Piccoli
Mr Piper

Mr Provest
Mrs Skinner
Mr Smith
Mr Souris
Mr Stokes
Mr Stoner
Mr J. H. Turner
Mr R. W. Turner
Mr J. D. Williams
Mr R. C. Williams
Tellers,
Mr George
Mr Maguire

Pair

Ms Burney

Mr Roberts

Question resolved in the affirmative.**Motion agreed to.****MONA VALE AND FRENCHS FOREST HOSPITALS****Mr BRAD HAZZARD** (Wakehurst) [1.18 p.m.]: I move:

That this House:

- (1) calls on the Government to honour its promise to provide six dialysis beds at Mona Vale Hospital; and
- (2) calls on the Government to ensure urgent construction of the proposed Frenchs Forest Hospital.

This motion is in two parts. One part relates to six dialysis beds at Mona Vale Hospital; the second part relates to the proposed Frenchs Forest hospital. I address first the six dialysis beds at Mona Vale Hospital. An issue for Coalition members is making sure that our local hospitals are well maintained and receive the essential equipment and staff to ensure that appropriate and necessary medical attention is provided across the State. Over the 14 years of this Labor Government hospital maintenance has diminished and construction has failed. This has put staff under enormous pressure. Unfortunately, that is the sad and sorry history of the New South Wales medical and health systems under State Labor. Who can forget the horror of the facilities, particularly the maternity facilities, at Camden and Campbelltown hospitals?

I note that the member for Macquarie Fields is at the table. Before he came into this place he was objective, critical and contributed in a very balanced way. I respected his position as a paediatrician; he spoke sensibly. Once he became a member of Parliament unfortunately he took on the cloak of the Labor Party and he now sees things from a different perspective. All things are good now, according to him. On this single occasion the member for Pittwater and I are pleased to say that, since the motion was placed on the Notice Paper more than a year ago, the Government—with our encouragement and that of community members—has responded and the six dialysis beds at Mona Vale Hospital are close to being delivered.

It has taken a long time to achieve this outcome but one thing that can be said about Coalition members is that when things get done, we acknowledge it. We do not deny it. We are happy to acknowledge that we are on the cusp of having these six dialysis beds, which are critical for patients on the northern beaches. When people require dialysis their whole body is diminished and they have little energy to do anything. At present patients who need dialysis four or five days a week have to travel from the peninsula to Royal North Shore Hospital or even to hospitals south of the Sydney Harbour Bridge, and this is very difficult for them. Local Liberal members and the community have been pushing hard to get some sort of facility on the northern beaches so that local patients who are in a very vulnerable physical state can have their dialysis locally.

Recently the member for Pittwater and I visited the new facility and we were encouraged to find that work has been largely completed. I am advised that next week checks will be made with the builders to ensure that any defect work is attended to—although from my overview of the area the work appeared to be of a high quality. However, in every new building some issues need to be addressed. Nevertheless, today I indicate that the local members of Parliament are pleased to acknowledge that the provision of dialysis beds is imminent. I speak regularly to constituents who are hanging out for this facility to open. If there are delays they may have to do with staffing.

Therefore, on behalf of local Liberal members and, I am sure, the Government, I encourage anybody with medical or nursing experience in dialysis to make themselves known to the Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service because it is currently advertising for staff. We anticipate, and are truly hopeful, that the Government will deliver on its expectation to have the facility open by June or July, which is only a month or two away. Never let it be said that Coalition members are not prepared to acknowledge a good outcome—even though it has been a long struggle over 14 years to get dialysis services into Mona Vale or Manly hospitals. But we will not say anything negative about this issue because we are so pleased to have this service. We welcome it on behalf of our residents. However, there is another part to the equation.

Mr Rob Stokes: Uh-oh!

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: As the member for Pittwater acknowledges, it is a bit unfortunate that we have to say once again—as we have for years—that the Government has failed to deliver on its promise to provide the people of the northern beaches with a new hospital. Manly Hospital has been run down—death by 1,000 lashes—during the 14 years that Labor has been in government. There is no argument that Manly Hospital was old when Labor came to office, but it had been maintained. The local community was heartened by that maintenance and was always prepared to raise money for the hospital. In fact, Harbord Diggers was a major sponsor of Manly Hospital. It raised millions of dollars, particularly for the orthopaedic ward.

The wonderfully supportive community of Pittwater has done everything possible to keep Mona Vale Hospital going. We acknowledge that finally, after years of Liberal members calling for maintenance work, some has been done in recent times—upon which the member for Pittwater will elaborate later. We acknowledge that work, but the Government promised a new hospital. The new hospital was originally to be located at Brookvale, then at Dee Why and finally at Frenchs Forest. We are quite prepared to be flexible; the problem is that the Government is allowing the facilities at Manly and Mona Vale hospitals in a broader sense—not just in the smaller areas that have been dealt with constructively—to diminish.

The population on the northern beaches needs a new hospital. I will not go back over the history of this issue because I have done that many times in the House. For more than a decade, residents have sought a new hospital on the northern beaches. I place on record the fact that every previous health Minister visited the hospitals and/or met with local Liberal members of Parliament to discuss the matter. They did not necessarily lead us as truthfully as they might to where we should have been heading, but they nevertheless discussed the issue, and progressed it in that sense. Since John Della Bosca became the Minister for Health he has not once visited Manly Hospital or Mona Vale Hospital. It is only a 25-minute drive from Parliament House to Manly Hospital, and 35 to 45 minutes down to Mona Vale Hospital. But the Minister has not once got into the big white saloon that is parked downstairs and driven to those hospitals.

Mr Rob Stokes: We would shout him lunch.

Mr BRAD HAZZARD: As the member for Pittwater said, he and I would shout the Minister lunch. Over the years I have had in my electorate the most senior Ministers in this Government—I will not name them—whom I have fed and watered on Dee Why Beach, which is a wonderful spot with great restaurants. We are quite prepared to do that with Mr Della Bosca. We know his propensity for good dinners and good lunches. We promise him that it will not be another Iguanagate; there will be no Iguanas, no problems. We will look after him. We will take him down to Dee Why Beach and feed him. The Minister needs to understand that the people on the northern beaches are also part of his constituency. Regardless of whether people live in Liverpool, Parramatta, Cronulla, Bega, the Tweed or Broken Hill, the Government is in office for at least another 20 months and is supposed to govern for all of them. It is time that Minister Della Bosca visited hospitals on the northern beaches.

In a recent answer to a question on notice the Minister indicated that he had visited 66 different hospitals since he became Minister, but he could not make the half-hour drive north of the Sydney Harbour Bridge. We often discover that Ministers who have left office visit the northern beaches regularly. They come over our way because they like the northern beaches. In fact, every Minister who has left this place has told me at some point that he or she has been to the northern beaches for social occasions. I am sure that when Minister Della Bosca heads up to the Central Coast he could divert slightly and whip down to Manly and Mona Vale hospitals.

We are concerned that our constituents are dying. This is a serious issue. People are not getting the medical attention they need. In the past couple of years I have had family members admitted to Manly Hospital. In fact, a very close family member died last year in that hospital so I have more than a passing understanding of the need for good hospital facilities. I was standing beside this close family relative when somebody came up and warned me that they thought the ceiling was going to fall in on her as she was dying. I felt quite hurt that I, as a local member of Parliament on the northern beaches, had not been able to get this Government to respond to this problem. Indeed, my constituents are also hurt that the Government has not responded to them in the way that a government should.

Debate adjourned on motion by Dr Andrew McDonald and set down as an order of the day for a future day.

[The Assistant Speaker (Mr Grant McBride) left the chair at 1.30 p.m. The House resumed at 2.15 p.m.]

QUESTION TIME

NEPEAN HOSPITAL ELECTRONIC MEDICAL RECORDS

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question is directed to the Premier. Will he confirm that, for the second time in three days, the electronic records system at Nepean Hospital's emergency department crashed on Tuesday this week and, as a result, staff yesterday banned the new system, describing it as dangerous, and opted instead to use pen and paper?

Mr NATHAN REES: The advice to me thus far—

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

Mr NATHAN REES: —concerns the power failure at the weekend. Electronic medical records were unable to be accessed at a number of hospitals, but there was no impact on equipment used to treat patients. I have also been advised that no records were lost as a result of the outage.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: The failure appears to have been related to maintenance being undertaken on a computer server that services a number of hospitals. The power failure lasted for around 45 minutes. However, the system was down for most of last Saturday as it was restored and tested. There is a contingency plan in place, and when the server failed these measures were implemented. The data collected during the outage is now being uploaded. I have been advised that there were no reports of adverse patient outcomes at the weekend. Obviously this incident is a concern, and if there has been a more recent incident that is also of concern. But we know that in the future electronic medical records will play an increasingly important role in improving patient care and safety.

Recently I visited Concord Hospital together with the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. The staff there have designed a computer records system specifically for each patient, their treatment needs, their medications and so on, and ultimately that will improve patient care and patient outcomes. As we move ahead with our \$100 million commitment to roll out e-medical records to all hospitals, the Government wants to ensure that appropriate contingencies are in place to cater for all eventualities. I am advised an investigation is underway into the incident that occurred last weekend—

Mrs Jillian Skinner: Tuesday.

The SPEAKER: Order!

Mr NATHAN REES: That investigation will obviously incorporate any other outages. The Minister for Health has advised me that, if necessary, changes will be implemented to prevent a recurrence.

JOBS PROTECTION

Mr RICHARD AMERY: I direct my question to the Premier. What is the latest information on Government efforts to support jobs in New South Wales?

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

Mr NATHAN REES: I thank the member for Mount Druitt for his important question. The Government has no higher priority than protecting and supporting employment in New South Wales. The Government will not be distracted from that task for one moment, not by the carping and negative Opposition or by anyone else. The Government has no greater priority—

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Supporting employment and jobs in New South Wales is the key priority of the Government. The Government is getting on with the task. This morning I announced an Australian first: a water-recycling licence for the private sector. Veolia Water will construct, maintain and operate a new recycled water plant at Fairfield, under the Water Industry Competition Act. The plant will initially provide more than four billion litres of recycled water a year, drawing wastewater from the Fairfield sewage treatment plant. Recycled water—

[Interruption]

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Champagne humour! The recycled water will then be distributed to industrial—

[Interruption]

Members opposite might be interested in this because it is about water, and the Opposition still has no policy on water. I thought the ears of the members opposite might have pricked up at the word "sewage", given that they wanted the people of Sydney to drink it at the last election.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. I will not tolerate interjections. The Premier has the call.

Mr NATHAN REES: The recycled water will then be distributed to industrial and irrigation users in western Sydney. This is an investment of \$100 million in our water industry and will create 64 jobs in construction and operation. That is but one example of the Government working to support jobs. The Australian Bureau of Statistics has released its unemployment data. In April 2009 the unemployment rate in New South Wales was 6 per cent, down from last month's revised figure of 6.8 per cent. The Australian unemployment rate decreased by 0.3 per cent, from 5.7 per cent to 5.4 per cent. New South Wales recorded one of the largest drops in unemployment of all of the States. Whilst I remain optimistic, the reality is that this could be a deep and unpredictable global recession. The Government is conscious that there is more work to be done in this area. Job creation is the first priority of the Government. While the Opposition is yet to tell us of its plan for creating jobs or supporting employment, the Government has been hard at work building infrastructure, encouraging and attracting new businesses—

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

Mr NATHAN REES: The member for Willoughby is wrong again. That is an emerging theme, Gladys, and you are better than that.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Willoughby to order for the third time. The member for Willoughby will be quiet for the remainder of question time.

Mr NATHAN REES: The Government has been hard at work encouraging and attracting new businesses and investment in New South Wales. In January China United Mining invested \$20 million in the Golden Cross Resources, Copper Hill project, with the creation of 180 new jobs and the retention of 14 existing jobs. Volgren selected Newcastle for its new bus manufacturing facility, with the creation of 150 new jobs and \$18 million investment in New South Wales. In March Regional Express airlines announced its decision to set up a pilot training academy in Wagga Wagga, with the creation of 74 new jobs and \$20 million investment in New South Wales. In April Fuji Xerox decided to consolidate its Asia-Pacific operations. Where? In Sydney, with 64 jobs over five years and \$5.3 investment to our capital city. Salmat Salesforce announced Sydney as it is new contact centre, with the creation of 120 new jobs. DSI—an automotive transmission company in Albury—was secured as a result of direct action by the New South Wales Government, which protected ongoing employment for 132 people and \$19 million in private investment to flow into Albury—

Mr John Williams: Point of order: The question specifically asked what the Government is doing about jobs. The Premier is reading out a list of private enterprises, not Government—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murray-Darling will resume his seat. He has been a member of this place long enough to know that is not a point of order.

Mr NATHAN REES: I am happy to respond to the point of order of the member for Murray-Darling. Last month, through the financial assistance of the New South Wales Government and other concessions, the Government secured the filming of *Green Lantern*—another \$90 million of production expenditure in Sydney and 500 jobs. Stemming from the two-day Jobs Summit, the Government announced a \$70 million major investment attraction fund to provide incentives to attract businesses to set up in New South Wales. The Government has also set up the Green Skills NSW Taskforce to drive jobs of the future dedicated to green skills development. Since the Jobs Summit, I am also pleased to report that the appointed industry go-to people, or those responsible for assisting major job-creating projects and driving investment in this State, are currently assessing more than 25 major job-creating projects.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Just this week—in one week alone—10 government agencies advertised tenders in Sydney newspapers supporting a further 217 jobs in New South Wales.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: The tenders include: the design and construction of a water treatment plant at Lake Cargelligo, 14 regional jobs; the supply of operating theatre equipment, nine jobs; the cleaning of CityRail car parks, 13 jobs; and essential repairs in Heritage Building Services, 120 maintenance jobs. This is evidence that the Government is delivering more jobs every day. We are sustaining jobs, creating jobs and supporting the climate for investment in New South Wales. A similar story can be told about the creation of jobs in the private sector. Since September 2008 the Government has approved 293 major projects valued at \$13 billion and supporting in excess of 52,000 jobs.

The Minister for Planning has approved 98 of those projects. Many of those projects would have hit the sand if the Coalition were ever near the Treasury benches. They are on record as having said so. The Opposition is at sixes and sevens on financial policy, fiscal policy, construction policy, investment policy and stimulus policy. Let me start with fiscal policy and financial management. The shadow Treasurer, the member for Manly, said on Sydney radio on 25 March, "We would never deliver budget where expenses growth grows faster than revenue growth." He reaffirmed that position in a media release the same day when he said, "My commitment is to never deliver a budget where spending grows at a greater rate than revenue. Such a commitment is basic sound financial management." The implication is that the Coalition would never go into deficit.

Mr Barry O'Farrell: You don't understand.

Mr NATHAN REES: We understand perfectly, Barry. You have been flushed out on this one. We understand perfectly that in order to deliver such a budget you either cut services or raise taxes.

[*Interruption*]

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

Mr NATHAN REES: I welcome the interjection because it allows me to talk about the contribution by the Leader of the Opposition. On 29 December, whilst promoting his economic credentials—

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: The Premier's answer has now taken about 10 minutes. The question was about jobs. He has drifted well and truly away from jobs. If he wants to answer a question about Opposition policy he can get one of his stooges to ask a question on it.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. I will listen further to the Premier.

Mr NATHAN REES: On 29 December the Leader of the Opposition said, "I will increase debt to rebuild the State." When asked how big a deficit he would be prepared to run, the Leader of the Opposition said, "How long is a piece of string?" We have been waiting more than four months now for the Opposition to tell us exactly how long is his piece of string. The shadow Treasurer does not have any piece of string at all. What does the Leader of the Opposition think—?

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order—

Ms Kristina Keneally: There is no point of order.

The SPEAKER: Order! There may be fewer points of order if there was not constant interjection when the Premier is responding. What is the member's point of order?

Mr Adrian Piccoli: The length of this question is now about 12 minutes. Mr Speaker, you have made previous statements about the length of answers. The Opposition did not interject while the Premier was talking about jobs, only now that he has strayed. Mr Wedderburn has previously referred to the Premier's performance in the House. This is clearly what he was talking about.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will not debate the point of order. I draw the Premier's attention to the length of his answer.

Mr NATHAN REES: The Government has made a total commitment to supporting employment and jobs in New South Wales. In stark contrast, the Opposition has appointed as the architect of its policy Max the Axe. It is in Coalition DNA to slash and burn services.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: I will run through the historic record. It hurts, but it is accurate.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: When the Coalition was last anywhere near the Treasury benches, this is what we got: 2,000 jobs went from teaching, 1,600 jobs went from electricity and 5,010 jobs went from school cleaners.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order—

The SPEAKER: Order! Does the member for Murrumbidgee take a new point of order?

Mr Adrian Piccoli: It relates to Standing Order 129. The question was about jobs.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. I place the member for Murrumbidgee on two calls to order. The Premier has the call.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: It is about jobs.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Murrumbidgee to order for the third time. He is on his final warning.

Mr NATHAN REES: This folder has every infrastructure project under our \$56 billion infrastructure plans for the next four years. It also has every job attached to every single project. If the Opposition wants, I will read it onto the record for the next two hours. Coalition members' DNA prohibits them from even contemplating that the support of employment and the creation of jobs are core business for Government. I will continue with the Coalition's record: Urban Transport Authority sale of plant, 300 jobs lost; the Huntley colliery and Tallawarra power station, which we resurrected, 886 jobs gone; the Roads and Traffic Authority, 700 jobs gone; the public service more generally, 11,00 jobs gone.

Mr Andrew Stoner: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 59. The Premier is starting to debate the issue. The question was about Government policy on jobs. If he wants to debate Opposition policy and the Opposition's track record on jobs, we are happy to do so.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Leader of The Nationals will resume his seat. I will listen further to the Premier. I remind him about the length of his answer.

Mr NATHAN REES: I have read about a quarter of the Opposition's historic record. Has it learnt anything? Not a jot. The architect of its policy prescription for New South Wales is Max Moore-Wilton, Max

the Axe. When Max Moore-Wilton was last in a position of influence this occurred: Urban Transport Authority sale of plant, 300 jobs went; State Rail Authority, 8,000 jobs went; the State Rail Authority between 1990 and 1993, another 6,000 jobs went; and the State Rail Authority during 1993 and 1994, another 10,000 jobs gone. That is 24,000 jobs gone in all those spheres under the influence of Max the Axe. And the Opposition has appointed him its jobs tsar! Max the Axe has a track record of sacking people.

In the face of the most serious threat to employment and the job security of working families right across New South Wales, the Opposition's prescription is a reversion to type. Its prescription is the appointment of Max the Axe, the man most infamous for the sacking of 24,000 people. That is its job prescription: the sacking and axing of services. The Opposition stands condemned. Rather than its mindless carping and whingeing, the Opposition is obliged to explain to the people of New South Wales its alternative. We know it cannot.

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: I refer to Standing Order 129. The question was about the Premier's actions on jobs. He does not have anything to say. Mr Wedderburn was right.

The SPEAKER: Order! The Premier has the call.

Mr NATHAN REES: I was not going to do this, but in response to the member for Murrumbidgee I will read it. Jobs in education, full-time equivalents arising from our stimulus package 7,344 in 2008-09, 7,126 in 2009-10, 6,559 in 2010-11 and 4,828 in 2011-12. That is jobs in education over the next four years. If the Opposition wants to talk about jobs, I will. Health, new jobs, 8,040 in 2008-09, 5,192 in 2009-10, 5,847 in 2010-11 and 1,932 in 2011-12. I could go on. I am sure Opposition members get the drift. The Government will spend \$56 billion on the largest infrastructure spend in State history over the next two years, underpinning approximately 150,000 jobs in New South Wales, as we go about the biggest spend and the biggest build since the Olympic Games. That is our prescription in the face of global recession, in stark contrast to the appointment of Max the Axe.

JOBS SUMMIT

Mr ANDREW STONER: My question is directed to the Premier. Given the Premier's self-professed wisdom on job creation, why has the Labor Prime Minister snubbed the Premier from the Jobs Summit he is holding here in the Premier's own State?

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order, including the Minister for Fair Trading and the member for Clarence.

Mr NATHAN REES: There is a pretty straightforward physics-based answer: A man cannot be in two places at once. Yesterday I was at Randwick with the Minister for Education and Training, and the Deputy Prime Minister of Australia. As we announced, there will be \$642 million for the upgrading of 410 schools right across New South Wales. Those schools each will receive their portion of \$642 million in the first wave of education spending by the Federal Government as we work in partnership with the Government to deliver new school halls, new school gyms, science laboratories and so on. That is where I was yesterday. That will create some 9,000 jobs and more than 800 apprenticeships as we concentrate on the task at hand, creating and supporting employment in New South Wales.

CBD METRO RAIL

Ms DIANE BEAMER: My question is directed to the Minister for Transport. What is the latest information on the CBD Metro?

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: I thank the member for her question on one of my favourite subjects.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the member for Murrumbidgee that he is on three calls to order.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: Every year of construction the CBD Metro will create work for around 2,000 people in New South Wales. That is 2,000 families every year who will directly benefit from this visionary project.

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: Every design plan drawn up, every bit of drilled earth and tunnel reinforced, every piece of track laid, every single piece of work that is done to build the metro network will create thousands of jobs and stimulate our economy. That is 2,000 jobs every year for five years that would not be created if the Leader of the Opposition and his friends were sitting on this side of the House. Unlike the critics on the other side, I am proud to say that the Rees Government has the vision and the courage to deliver a change in public transport services in this State.

The SPEAKER: Order! There is too much audible conversation in the Chamber. Members who want to conduct conversations will do so outside the Chamber.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: The member for Willoughby has gone very quiet today. Metros are the future of Sydney's public transport, and the CBD Metro is just the start. It is the first stage of a fully integrated transport system that will link commuters with the heavy rail network, with our ferry services and with our buses. The CBD Metro is the most complex engineering and construction project in Sydney since the Harbour Bridge. It will be a piece of infrastructure of which Sydneysiders, and indeed all Australians, will be proud.

But it is not just about building better transport to get passengers from A to B. It is about providing better environmental outcomes by getting more people out of their cars and onto an interconnected network of trains, buses and ferries. It is about jobs growth—as I said before, 2,000 jobs every year for five years of construction. It is also about cultural and social change, and by this I mean changing the way people use public transport, not using it just for the daily commute to work. A fully integrated transport system with metro at its heart will encourage people to use public transport at other times, such as leaving the car at home on a night out or having a cheap and convenient way to go shopping on the weekend.

Work is underway, with Sydney Metro having already launched its project application and preliminary environmental assessment with the Department of Planning. Geotechnical test drilling is underway at sites across the city, and later this year expressions of interest will be called for construction, operation and maintenance of the CBD Metro. The Government is investing \$4.8 billion in the project. A range of cost estimates for the capital project was determined and it ranges from \$4.6 billion through to \$5.3 billion. The range allows for different levels of contingency, risk and changes to the scope of the project. That is not uncommon or new. We must be prepared for the uncertainties that can occur with major projects over long time frames. Construction will begin next year and the CBD Metro will operate for commuters in 2015.

While the Government presses ahead with this exciting vision for commuters, the member for Willoughby can only whinge, whine and complain about it. But what else can she do? Her acting leader killed off metros during a television interview a few weeks ago. The Opposition has got no new ideas for public transport and hardly a policy in sight, except, of course, the policy that creates an additional layer of bureaucrats to make decisions for them—probably headed up by Max the Axe. So far all the Opposition has been able to do is peddle misinformation in a desperate attempt to mislead the public over this project. John Bradfield said, "Where there is no vision the people will perish".

Mr Chris Hartcher: That was the *Bible*, not Bradfield.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Terrigal should be careful with his interjections.

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: I do not for one minute claim that anyone involved in this project is a John Bradfield. But those opposite are denying Sydney a modern vision that Bradfield would be proud of. The Opposition has shown its complete lack of understanding about what a metro system means for this State. It has no vision, no courage and no plan for the future. The Leader of the Opposition is standing in the way of Sydney's journey to become a modern global city. This shows that the Opposition has no credibility in public transport in this State.

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

Mr DAVID CAMPBELL: As I said, it shows the potential for 2,000 direct jobs for each of five years during construction. We have builders on this side of the House, wreckers on the other side.

NOWRA JAIL STEEL CONTRACT

Mr BARRY O'FARRELL: My question is directed to the Premier. Given the Premier's claim to have no higher priority than supporting "existing jobs and the creation of new jobs for families in New South Wales", will the Premier explain to the House why a steel contract for the new Nowra jail has been awarded to a Vietnamese company? Why is the Premier stealing steel from the steel city?

Mr NATHAN REES: It will come as no revelation to most people in this Chamber that we are part of an international economy. The last time the Opposition ran an argument like this it was trotted out by the member for Oxley in his Italian suit, as I remember. A wry grin! Once again, the hypocrisy is breathtaking.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: The Government's procurement policy ensures government spending achieves best value for money for public funds while being fair, ethical and transparent, and maximising jobs and opportunities for the New South Wales economy. The policy therefore recognises that value for money also captures the broader economic benefit. One element of our current procurement policy is the price preference scheme.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: The price preference scheme helps Australian small to medium enterprises win government business and build jobs, which, of course, support the local economy and job creation. This is a balancing act. While government procurement should always achieve the best value for taxpayer money, it must also support the New South Wales economy and in so doing recognise the benefits obtained from our participation in free-trade agreements.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: The reality is that our State's export industries also create jobs, and a large part of that job creation is attributable to the free-trade agreements, which have opened up overseas markets to our State's businesses, including in the United Arab Emirates, where I was recently. University of Wollongong—

Mr Barry O'Farrell: What about the Illawarra?

Mr NATHAN REES: The last time I looked Wollongong was part of the Illawarra.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: It is a tremendous success story in exports from New South Wales to the rest of the world as Wollongong University exports its education services to the United Arab Emirates. I was there recently. There are more graduates out of the University of Wollongong's campus in Dubai than all other universities combined.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: That is an outstanding success story. That is business being exported as we energetically pursue investment in New South Wales.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: The Government is reviewing the economic development guidelines to ensure that small and medium enterprises have every opportunity to compete for government contracts. The Government is reducing red tape and speeding up the procurement process to promote further job creation. It is also streamlining procedures, simplifying contracts and making it easier to do business with the Government. Manufacturers of constructions products will welcome the boost to construction that was recently triggered by the Rudd Government's landmark stimulus reforms and delivered by this Government. In a non-stimulus year, the Department of Commerce would procure about \$1 billion worth of goods and services for use on construction projects that it manages on behalf of the New South Wales Government and local councils. Of that, about one-third is for labour and 67 per cent is for materials. I am advised that 90 per cent of materials used in general construction—that is bricks, gyprock, glazing and most timbers—is made or manufactured locally.

MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES

Mrs DAWN FARDELL: I direct my question to the Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health). What is the latest information on how the Government's investment in skilled jobs ensures that New South Wales continues to provide world-class mental health services?

Mrs BARBARA PERRY: The challenge for governments around the world is to maintain high standards of mental health care delivery whilst prudently responding to the fallout from the global economic meltdown. The Rees Government is determined to meet this challenge by heavily investing in a strong, highly skilled mental health workforce. This is good news for people living with mental illness, their carers and families, the mental health workforce and the wider community.

Just yesterday, this Government announced that \$1.5 million would be invested over the next three years in professional development scholarships for workers in the non-government community mental health sector. A total of 465 scholarships will be awarded over the next three years. These scholarships will offer a range of accredited courses, including certificates in mental health, training and assessment, and clinical pathways, as well as training in management skills. Over the past few years this Government has been investing heavily in non-government organisations [NGOs] to boost their capacity to assist people living with a mental illness. That includes \$1.6 million in infrastructure grants for mental health non-government organisations. Now the Government is helping to expand the skills of non-government workers to meet that capacity.

This Government is investing in the non-government sector and improving access to community mental health services. This State has a record mental health budget of more than \$1 billion. In fact, 82 per cent of new funding in this record budget is dedicated to community-based care. From 2003-04 to 2007-08 this Government has increased the number of mental health staff by almost 20 per cent. That is an additional 1,107 mental health staff taking the total from 5,693 to 6,800. There will be more jobs as we continue to expand mental health services across the State.

With five major mental health units opened already in the first four months of this year and more on the way, this Government is delivering more jobs to New South Wales. This includes: the 14-bed older persons unit at Wollongong, opened in January; the 20-bed rehabilitation unit and new child and adolescent day unit at Shellharbour, opened in February; the 135-bed forensic hospital at Malabar, opened in February; and the 20-bed rehabilitation unit at Sutherland, opened in April. That is an investment of almost \$200 million into state-of-the-art mental health facilities. I have visited each of these units and I have great admiration, as should all members, for the staff and their commitment and compassion. The facilities are truly exceptional.

To support the growing network of services across New South Wales, the Government is drawing the State's best mental health workers into the public system. It is also building strong partnerships with educational facilities and accrediting authorities, such as universities and the Institute of Psychiatry. In 2006, the Government invested more than \$23 million over five years to expand the workforce and to bolster their capacity to deliver mental health services. Current programs target areas of need including rural and remote mental health, older people's mental health and child and adolescent mental health.

We all know that the lifeblood of our health system is nurses. Nurses make up the majority of mental health staff in New South Wales and this Government continues to make investments designed to attract people to mental health nursing. The Mental Health Connect program is designed to attract trained nurses to the public mental health system. Since 2005, 141 have been nurses brought back to public mental health nursing through the program. Between 2006 and 2009, 705 mental health nursing scholarships have been taken up including 13 Mental Health Innovations Scholarships, 444 postgraduate scholarships, and 248 registered nurse scholarships for enrolled nurses.

We also have the best minds in the world working to unlock some of the remaining mystery behind mental illness. New South Wales has five of the world's 10 leading mental health researchers, including Associate Professor Phil Mitchell, Professor Vaughan Carr, Professor Gordon Parker, Gavin Andrews and Ian Hickey. At the heart of this holistic approach to mental health policy are the people who live with mental illness. This Labor Government is determined to do whatever it can to help those people to have more fulfilling and productive lives.

AMBULANCE TRIPLE-0 CALL CENTRE RESPONSE

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER: My question is directed to the Premier. Following the shocking revelations and findings handed down by the coronial inquest into the tragic death of David Iredale today, will the Premier give a guarantee to David's parents and the community that he will implement immediately all the recommendations regarding ambulance triple-0 call centre operations?

Mr NATHAN REES: I am aware that a matter of hours ago the Deputy State Coroner released a series of recommendations relating to the tragic death of David Iredale. Evidence presented to the inquiry was very concerning. The Government accepts that there have been clear deficiencies and it accepts the coroner's findings. The recommendations cover the portfolios of Health, Emergency Services, Environment and Climate Change, and Sport and Recreation. I have asked the Ministers responsible to start work immediately on implementing these recommendations as they relate to their portfolio responsibilities.

Given the complex nature of our triple-0 services, I have asked that the Minister for Health work with his colleagues, in particular the Ministers for Police and Emergency Services, in coordinating the implementation of those recommendations relating to emergency response and ambulance services. I have also requested that the Department of Premier and Cabinet provide any assistance necessary in coordinating this work across government. The Minister for Health will immediately take action in relation to the Deputy State Coroner's recommendations about the Ambulance Service's database and software and the conduct of a root-cause analysis to be carried out by an independent expert.

Everyone in this Chamber would feel enormous sympathy for the Iredale family, particularly for David's parents, who have suffered such a dreadful loss. The Ambulance Service receives more than 3,000 calls a day. We must ensure that they are answered swiftly and dealt with professionally and with empathy. I know our emergency service personnel are dedicated to that task. We have a world-class service, but these tragic events show there are times when it has failed. The Government accepts all the recommendations and will implement them forthwith.

CONSUMER PROTECTION

Mr NICK LALICH: My question is directed to the Minister for Fair Trading. Will the Minister update the House on what the Office of Fair Trading is doing to protect consumers in New South Wales?

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: I thank the member for his question and for his continued interest in consumer protection in the great State of New South Wales. In these challenging economic times New South Wales families deserve to get the best possible value for their money. The Rees Government will not stand by if consumers are ripped off or taken for a ride when spending their hard-earned wages.

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: From my first day as Minister, the Office of Fair Trading and I have worked relentlessly to ensure that New South Wales consumers have a fair and equitable market place. Fair Trading is actively spreading the Rees Government's consumer protection message throughout the community so that people know where to turn should things, sadly, go wrong. In the first quarter of this year New South Wales consumers have launched more than 11,000 complaints with Fair Trading, an increase of 9 per cent on the same period last year.

The SPEAKER: Order! I call the member for Coffs Harbour to order for the third time. He is on his final warning.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: Leading the ladder of shame was dissatisfaction with household electrical goods and white goods, followed by residential building structure, and computer equipment and hardware coming in third. Consumers are our eyes and ears. I urge them to call Fair Trading on 13 32 20 or visit us on the web at www.fairtrading.nsw.gov.au to lodge a complaint or report their concerns. While any increase in complaints is a concern, this trend shows that some consumers are more aware of their rights. They are turning to Fair Trading for assistance and advice, and they know help is only a phone call away.

To deal with the shonks, the Rees Government has invested \$160 million in consumer protection and has dedicated more funds than any other State to enforcing the laws. I am proud of our investigative and compliance division. It does a fantastic job, and I have seen the results firsthand. It helps consumers right across the State and works with local traders, retailers and suppliers. Members of that division talk to real people, unlike The Nationals with their listening tour of Queanbeyan, who spoke only to microphones.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind the House that a number of members are on three calls to order.

Ms VIRGINIA JUDGE: Just last week I visited Ballina for a series of compliance checks and regional access program events. I joined Fair Trading inspectors to test price scanners to ensure shoppers are not

short-changed at the checkout. We visited local service stations to make sure motorists are not ripped off at the petrol pump. Members on this side think these are important matters, even if members on the other side could not be bothered. We can see where their conscience lies. I have a clear message for traders who even think of breaking our laws: Make no mistake, you will be caught.

TAMWORTH HOSPITAL REDEVELOPMENT

Mr PETER DRAPER: I direct my question to the Premier. Given that earlier today The Nationals were forced into committing, in *Hansard*, to the redeveloped Tamworth Hospital, will he reconfirm his commitment that the construction of the hospital will commence during this term of Parliament?

Mr Chris Hartcher: Point of order: Standing orders do not allow argumentative questions. That was a very argumentative question, "Given that ... The Nationals were forced ..." to do certain things. I invite you to rule the question out of order.

Mr John Aquilina: To the point of order: I do not know where the member for Terrigal was, but the question I heard clearly asked the Premier to reply to a specific question to the House.

The SPEAKER: Order! I invite the member for Tamworth to restate his question.

Mr PETER DRAPER: Thank you for the further opportunity. I direct my question to the Premier. Will the Premier reconfirm his commitment that construction of the Tamworth Hospital redevelopment will commence during this term of Parliament?

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

Mr NATHAN REES: I thank the member for Tamworth for his question. He has been a strong advocate for his community on this issue. Just yesterday he came knocking on my door to press the case for Tamworth Hospital. I let him in and we had a discussion, and he pressed his case. I assure the member and his community that our commitment to Tamworth Hospital is unchanged. The New South Wales Government will begin work on a new Tamworth Hospital in this term.

The SPEAKER: Order! I place the member for Murray-Darling on three calls to order.

Mr NATHAN REES: We will begin work on a new Tamworth Hospital in this term. Work is progressing. I am happy to advise the member that the clinical services plan for the new hospital has been endorsed. Health Infrastructure has been formally notified, and within the next two weeks tenders will be called to appoint a project director for planning. While that work is underway, economic advisers appointed by Health Infrastructure in April, ACIL Tasman, are finalising their strategic planning work.

The member for Tamworth would have been disappointed that The Nationals backed away from their commitment to the hospital. In a display of verbal gymnastics the Liberals and The Nationals have bounced around what, frankly, are a lot of weasel words on this issue, further exposing their lack of ability to arrive at a coherent policy position. The land speed record was broken as The Nationals ran away from their commitment to build the Tamworth Hospital. Instead, they wanted to establish a task force. The good people of Tamworth took little time to see through that. A backflip is what the *Northern Daily Leader*, the key journal of record in the region, called that. It said it was a "slap in the face" for the people of Tamworth. That is how The Nationals' position was assessed locally. On Saturday their leader said the national task force was a "smokescreen". No wonder the people of Tamworth are so upset.

In August, the member for North Shore and shadow health spokesperson seemed to have a different view. No task force for her; she wanted to match the Government's commitment to build a new Tamworth hospital. The flip came last Thursday, with the Leader of The Nationals leaving the commitment to the hospital in the dust of his travelling road show. Has that not been a smashing success? In Queanbeyan for 30 minutes, did not talk to a local, and then they are out creating unease and insecurity for the good people of Tamworth about the future of their health services.

This morning we announced the first private sector involvement in water delivery in Australia under the Water Industry Competition Act, which reminded me that two years on there is still no policy for water from the other side of the House. After the last election, the Leader of the Opposition said to the media when he was

asked about policy, "We will get back to you in a couple of years." The clock is ticking. It is well over two years and there is still no water policy, still no energy policy, still no coherent health policy, still no coherent policy in relation to the Department of Community Services [DOCS], unless the old policy stands, which is to get rid of that department. On the most basic and fundamental of issues, whether he will or will not build a hospital in Tamworth, he still cannot get his story straight.

SPORTING GROUP GRANTS

Ms ALISON MEGARRITY: My question is addressed to the Minister for Sport and Recreation. What action has the Government taken to support sporting groups in New South Wales?

Mr KEVIN GREENE: I am pleased to advise the House that the capital assisted program grants will be available across New South Wales, in all 93 electorates, made up of a \$4 million contribution by the State Government. I was in the electorate of Drummoyne this morning with the hardworking member for Drummoyne. We visited the Inner Western Suburbs Netball Association courts at Cintra Park, a venue that has been used by that organisation for more than 40 years. I am pleased to say that association will receive \$30,000 for improved amenities and some sewerage and drainage works that will take place at that site. This is one example of the more than 300 organisations, councils, community groups, and sporting clubs that will benefit from this \$4 million investment.

Some members have been involved with this program before, and I thank them for the information they have provided as part of the process. The information allows us to make these grants, which are based on a dollar-for-dollar arrangement with local community groups as a minimum contribution. Since 2003 we have seen government contributions in the vicinity of \$22 million, and that has led to improved sporting facilities worth more than \$50 million of investment in our communities. Only a couple of weeks ago I was in the electorate of Port Macquarie, where the local member invited me to see a number of the facilities. One of the organisations I visited was the West Port Macquarie Tennis Club, which, I notice, will benefit this year from investment to improve the fencing around its facilities.

The members of this group are in their eighties and they are still participating in the great game of tennis. It is fantastic that people of that age still participate in sport, but it is also great that junior sporting groups are also benefiting from this capital investment: the Government is encouraging healthy lifestyles. I can give other examples. I am sure that you, Mr Speaker, will be pleased to advise your community that the Uralla pool will benefit from an upgrade as a result of your hard work and representations.

The SPEAKER: The Minister is well in order!

Mr KEVIN GREENE: Work is also taking place on Guyra pool. Those two communities in the Northern Tablelands will benefit from this investment. I know that constituents of the member for Barwon, who I understand is the shadow Minister for something related to sport, will also benefit. Canteen facilities at Alan Burns Oval, which is used by Trangie local soccer club, will be upgraded. On the Central Coast, noise barriers will be erected at the junior motorcycle club. Canteen facilities at Springwood will also be upgraded. These upgrades are part of a \$4 million investment by the Government. We are proud to support local sporting clubs, which do magnificent work not only in providing facilities but also in developing those who wish to participate in sport, be they young or not so young.

NEPEAN HOSPITAL ELECTRONIC MEDICAL RECORDS

Mr NATHAN REES: Earlier in question time I was asked a number of questions, but I want to provide supplementary answers to two of them in particular. The first relates to Nepean Hospital electronic medical records. These supplementary answers remind me that not only is the Opposition a policy-free zone—

Mr Adrian Piccoli: Point of order: The opportunity to give supplementary answers is not an opportunity for half an hour to research the answer. Mr Wedderburn has said the Premier—

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Murrumbidgee will resume his seat. Given that comment, there is no point of order. The Premier has the call.

Mr NATHAN REES: That is an excellent ruling, Mr Speaker. Earlier in question time I was asked about the electronic medical records system at Nepean Hospital. I am advised by the chief executive of the

Sydney West Area Health Service that claims from some staff in relation to the electronic medical records [EMR] system are currently being investigated. Advice received to date is that at 4.26 a.m. on Tuesday a help desk call was logged because there were problems printing a letter.

The SPEAKER: Order! I remind members that the Premier is providing a supplementary answer. It is not an opportunity for debate.

Mr NATHAN REES: This is the official advice to me, and a reminder that the member for North Shore is simply wrong. Other than the difficulty with the printer, the advice to me is that on Tuesday all systems were operating normally.

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

Mr NATHAN REES: Nevertheless, Health Support and Sydney West Information Technology Services are investigating. To ensure that clinical staff have confidence in the system, one element of the online clinical documentation was suspended whilst awaiting the review of the critical incident at the weekend. The FirstNet components of the electronic medical records are being used by all staff and functioning within operational standards. On the official advice to me, the member is simply wrong.

NOWRA JAIL STEEL CONTRACT

Mr NATHAN REES: I was also asked about steel being used at the Nowra correctional centre. I am advised that the steel being used in the construction of the South Coast Correctional Centre at Nowra is Australian steel. The steel is fabricated by a company called Mass Steel (Australia) Pty Ltd, which is based in Wallacia.

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will come to order. I call the member for Penrith to order. I call the member for South Coast to order for the second time.

Question time concluded.

PETITIONS

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**.

Corowa Hospital Nursing Home Beds

Petition requesting the retention of nursing home beds at Corowa Hospital, received from **Mr Greg Aplin**.

Breast Screening Funding

Petition requesting funding for breast screening to allow access for women aged 40 to 79 years, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Tumut Renal Dialysis Service

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

Deniliquin Renal Dialysis Centre

Petition requesting a renal dialysis centre at Deniliquin Hospital, received from **Mr John Williams**.

Schofields Railway Station

Petition praying that Schofields Railway Station remain on its current site, received from **Ms Gladys Berejiklian**.

Jannali Railway Station Staffing Levels

Petition requesting the retention of the staff and customer service levels at Jannali Railway Station, received from **Mr Barry Collier**.

Miranda Railway Station Staffing Levels

Petition requesting the retention of the staff and customer service levels at Kirrawee Railway Station, received from **Mr Barry Collier**.

Kirrawee Railway Station Staffing Levels

Petition requesting the retention of the staff and customer service levels at Kirrawee Railway Station, received from **Mr Barry Collier**.

Gymea Railway Station Staffing Levels

Petition requesting the retention of the staff and customer service levels at Gymea Railway Station, received from **Mr Barry Collier**.

Hawkesbury River Railway Station Access

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

Bus Service 311

Petition praying that the Government urgently improve bus service 311 to make it more frequent and more reliable, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Whale Protection

Petition requesting the protection of whales in Australian waters, received from **Mrs Judy Hopwood**.

Caged Birds Trade

Petition requesting that legislation be introduced to stop the trade of caged birds, and ban trading and selling of Australian native birds, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Pet Shops

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

Sow Stalls

Petition requesting a total ban on sow stalls, received from **Ms Clover Moore**.

Brooklyn Police Station

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

Mosman Police Station

Petition requesting the retention of Mosman Police Station, received from **Mrs Jillian Skinner**.

Iron Cove Bridge Project

Petition opposing the construction of an additional bridge over Iron Cove, received from **Ms Gladys Berejiklian**.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT AMENDMENT (ELECTIONS) BILL 2008**Discharge of Order of the Day and Withdrawal of Bill**

Order of the day discharged on motion by Mr John Aquilina.

Bill withdrawn on motion by Mr John Aquilina.

Message sent to the Legislative Council advising it of the resolution.

CONSIDERATION OF MOTIONS TO BE ACCORDED PRIORITY**Mental Health Services**

Ms LYLEA McMAHON (Shellharbour—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.16 p.m.]: Investing in mental health is a matter of priority not only for this Government but also for the whole community, particularly during these uncertain times. The global financial crisis is placing unusual and exceptional stresses upon ordinary men and women in our community and exacerbating the circumstances for those who are the most vulnerable. Do Opposition members care? Are they concerned and do they support the Government's efforts in supporting those who need our assistance and help? Are they interested in supporting the most vulnerable in our community?

The SPEAKER: Order! Members will cease interjecting.

Ms LYLEA McMAHON: No, no, no! Their interjections prove how unimportant this issue is to them. The motion should be accorded priority to welcome the New South Wales Labor Government's investment in mental health jobs, to provide mental health services to those in New South Wales who need them. This motion should be accorded priority to acknowledge our record \$1.9 billion budget that is helping to deliver a first-class mental health service. This motion should be accorded priority to note that the mental health workforce has grown by almost 20 per cent over the past five years. However, members on the backbench are giggling about this important issue. I am sure their constituents who are concerned about mental health would want to know why they are giggling.

The SPEAKER: Order! The House will come to order. The Parliamentary Secretary will address her comments through the Chair.

Ms LYLEA McMAHON: This motion should be accorded priority because it is an important issue for the community and those who need support and assistance. The carers of those with a mental illness want to know what the Government is doing to help those who need support. As I stated, the motion should be accorded priority to note that the mental health workforce has grown by almost 20 per cent over the past five years, employing an additional 1,117 mental health staff, creating jobs, investing in services and supporting families. But what can we expect from the Opposition during this debate?

Mr Brad Hazzard: Point of order: The issue of mental health is one both sides of the House should respect and Opposition members certainly do, as I am sure do Government members. I ask that you direct the member to direct her comments through the Chair rather than playing juvenile games.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Wakehurst will resume his seat. I have asked the member for Shellharbour to direct her comments through the Chair.

Ms LYLEA McMAHON: I draw the attention of the member for Wakehurst to the members on his backbench and their juvenile behaviour. They are giggling like toddlers over a cartoon.

The SPEAKER: Order! Government members will remain silent.

Ms LYLEA McMAHON: But what can we expect from the Opposition during debate on this important issue? Nothing—no policy, no investment in services, no support for families.

Mr Andrew Fraser: Point of order: The role of the member for Shellharbour is to address priority for the motion; it is not to attack the Opposition or put forward supposition about what the Opposition may or may not—

The SPEAKER: Order! As the member for Coffs Harbour knows, I always extend a degree of latitude in these debates. I am sure that when the Opposition debates similar issues the member for Coffs Harbour will receive equal latitude from the Chair.

Ms LYLEA McMAHON: As I was saying, what can we expect from the Opposition during debate on this important issue? Nothing—no policy, no investment in services and no support for families who are the vulnerable people in our community. What we have on the Opposition benches are spoilers, wreckers, empty vessels, and gigglers who like to sit in the corner and make fun of important issues.

The SPEAKER: Order! The member for Shellharbour will cease making those comments. If she does not address her remarks through the Chair I will sit her down.

Ms LYLEA McMAHON: My motion should be accorded priority to give the Opposition a chance to get behind the New South Wales Government's initiatives to provide— *[Time expired.]*

Nepean Hospital Electronic Medical Records

Mrs JILLIAN SKINNER (North Shore—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) [3.21 p.m.]: I seek priority for my motion regarding the loss of computerised patient records at Nepean Hospital and the concern expressed by emergency doctors about its impact on their ability to care for patients. Earlier today the Premier misled the House when he indicated in a supplementary answer to a question that there was no shutdown of the computerised medical record at Nepean Hospital on Tuesday this week. I inform the House that that is the very reason why this motion must be given priority. We need to debate this matter.

Members need to know that the emergency department doctors at Nepean Hospital called me about the matter. I am sure the member for Penrith knows this; she should contact the hospital to confirm it. Incidentally, some of those doctors are prepared to speak out, and they will do so in the very near future. The doctors told me they are very concerned that the computerised patient records system went down for six hours last Saturday due to an electronic glitch and yet again on Tuesday this week when the computerised system failed. The emergency department doctors have told me, and I quote their exact words, "It is too dangerous. We pulled the pin on keeping electronic medical records yesterday. We have decided to revert to pen and paper."

Every member in this House must understand this. A patient might have a seizure in the emergency department. The patient is given medication, diagnostic tests are ordered, and the patient's blood pressure is taken. If the computerised medical records system suddenly goes down, the emergency department doctors have no idea what treatment the patient has been given or the results of the diagnostic tests. No wonder the doctors are pulling the plug and going back to pen and paper. In answers to questions during question time today the Premier indicated that he would fully investigate any incident where this sort of thing happens. These problems go back to 2007, when the computerised medical records system was first implemented. I have received a stream of emails from emergency department doctors throughout the Western Sydney Area Health Service and beyond highlighting the problems. I will read a couple of those emails. In 2007 I received an email that stated:

Well the predictable happened. The whole of Firstnet crashed completely last week. It was implemented at Nepean Hospital on Wednesday, first crashed on Thursday am, and then was down almost all of Friday, when the whole area crashed: Westmead, Blacktown, Auburn and Nepean all with no Emergency Department Management System.

A further email in 2007 stated:

Program repeatedly crashed without warning ...

Another email in that year stated:

... never before has so much been promised, yet so little delivered by people with little insight and so little time or interest in listening to those who use the product and have to treat the patients.

The reason my motion must be given priority today is that the doctors at Nepean Hospital have told me that 20 per cent of the patients attending the hospital's emergency department are walking out without being treated because they cannot wait any longer. They feel too sick to wait for treatment that they are not sure will ever be

given. A doctor at Nepean Hospital told me that the latest figures—the March figures have not yet been posted on the website, but we will watch them when they are posted—show that only 40 per cent of category 2 patients at Nepean Hospital are being seen within the 10-minute benchmark. I remind the House that category 2 patients are those with imminently life-threatening conditions, who are supposed to be seen within 10 minutes. Why is this happening? Because the entire system is slow and it does not help doctors do the right thing by their patients. When the system crashes altogether patients' lives are at risk.

One does not have to be a genius to work it out. If a doctor has no record of what has happened to a patient, that patient is at risk. As the doctor pointed out to me, patients are at even greater risk when there is a shift change and there is no handover from one doctor or nurse or other person working in the emergency department to another. They simply do not know what has happened with the patient. The last word comes from Dr Sally McCarthy, the President of the College of Emergency Medicine, who wrote a briefing paper for the Emergency Care Taskforce, an official body set up by the Government in 2007 when the electronic health records system was starting to be rolled out. Dr McCarthy included in the briefing paper direct quotes of 0 New South Wales emergency physicians when satisfaction with this program was first canvassed. I will read just one of those direct quotes:

We know that there have been patient care safety issues, quite apart from the system making our work harder and slower ...

We must debate this motion.

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

The House divided.

Ayes, 45

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

Noes, 39

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

Pair

Ms Burney

Mr Piccoli

Question resolved in the affirmative.**MENTAL HEALTH SERVICES****Motion Accorded Priority****Ms LYLEA McMAHON** (Shellharbour—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.34 p.m.]: I move:

That this House

- (1) welcomes the New South Wales Government's investment in mental health jobs to provide mental health care services to New South Wales;
- (2) notes that the New South Wales Government has employed an additional 1,107 mental health staff during the last five years, an increase in the mental health workforce of almost 20 per cent; and
- (3) calls on the Opposition to get behind the New South Wales Government's initiatives to provide mental health care jobs.

This Government is determined to improve access to mental health services for patients and their families. It is improving the effectiveness of community care, providing more mental health beds, improving services for young patients and the elderly, and placing a strong focus on building the mental health workforce. I am proud to say that over recent years this Government has put mental health fairly and squarely back on the national agenda and the Government's record \$1.09 billion budget is helping to deliver a first-class mental health system across New South Wales. The Government is also building a skilled mental health workforce that is helping to deliver these important services. That workforce is helping some of the most vulnerable members of our community in their times of greatest need. From an acute phase of their illness, through to rehabilitation and ongoing help through community-based care, the Government is investing in services to help them get back on track to manage their illness and lead very fulfilling and productive lives.

Despite the current financial crisis we face as a global community, the expansion and retention of the mental health workforce remains a top priority of the Government. The Government's investment in mental health has seen the mental health workforce increase by 20 per cent, or an additional 1,107 workers, bringing the total number of mental health workers to 6,800. This is a great achievement, especially in view of the recognised national shortage of mental health staff. With more services being developed across the State there is more opportunity to draw mental health workers back to the public health sector.

In my electorate of Shellharbour the new \$6.65 million 20-bed mental health rehabilitation unit and the \$1.32 million child and adolescent day unit delivered by this Government are staffed by 38 full-time equivalent positions. Both of those services have only recently been opened. In fact, four state-of-the-art services have opened in my local area health service this year, and a six-bed \$6.65 million child and adolescent mental health inpatient unit is planned for Shellharbour Hospital. That unit will provide a purpose-built facility to cater for the needs of adolescent mental health patients in the Illawarra by improving assessment, stabilisation and short-term treatment, and will provide a place where young people can be cared for by an inpatient service in their community with family support. I am pleased to advise the House that my local area health service has just received Government approval to commence the next phase of planning—the detailed design phase—which will commence this month. This is going to provide even more specialist mental health care to the region.

Members on the other side should be backing these initiatives and should get behind the Government by acknowledging its tremendous achievements in the area of mental health. The Opposition should support mental health staff for the wonderful job they do in our community, but the Opposition is sadly lacking in the policy department. In fact, the people of New South Wales have not been offered any alternate policy ideas since before the last election. That says a lot about the commitment of the Opposition to some of the most vulnerable members of our community. But I guess that is the difference between the Opposition and the Government.

As my colleague mentioned in Question Time today, the key to maintaining a skilled workforce lies not just in recruitment but also in providing the appropriate support, mentoring and training to improve skills and retain the best mental health workforce. Since 2006 more than 700 nursing scholarships have been provided to

build the skills of our workforce and to provide opportunities for career advancement. Mental health workers join the health system because they know they will work in first-class facilities. In the electorate of Shellharbour that is certainly true. The recently opened facilities, including a child and adolescent day unit and 20-bed rehabilitation unit, are world class.

Mental health workers will be supported to develop their skills, and this is not limited to those working in our busy hospitals. The Rees Government has invested heavily in the community mental health sector. After providing \$1.6 million in infrastructure grants to build the capacity of mental health non-government organisations to deliver services to the community we are now supporting them with 465 scholarships valued at more than \$1.5 million. These scholarships will help staff with the skills to provide the best possible care to people living with a mental illness.

The Government is determined to expand community-based care. In fact, 82 per cent of new funds in the mental health budget have been dedicated to community-based care. Hearing the personal stories of the people who use these services and their families, one develops a newfound appreciation of the vital role these services and the staff members play in the care and wellbeing of people in our community. The Government is maintaining a world-class standard of mental health services across New South Wales and investing in a strong and highly skilled workforce. I call upon the Opposition to support today's motion, which places an emphasis on mental health and the important role it plays in our community.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES (Barwon) [3.41 p.m.]: It gives me great pleasure to respond on behalf of the Opposition, particularly on the important issue of mental health. I believed we had a bipartisan position on mental health. But a junior backbencher, not the Minister, has led this important debate. The member for Shellharbour politicised the issue right from her opening remarks. The Government says that it is committed to mental health service delivery. The Opposition has heard overwhelmingly from the community—industry, workers, carers, clients and patients—that that is not the case. We would welcome any developments in mental health such as capital infrastructure. It is an indictment of the Government that it has taken a decade to commit to projects announced today. It is another example that the Government is not listening. I move:

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

this House:

- (1) welcomes the New South Wales Liberal-Nationals Coalition support for inclusive mental health service delivery;
- (2) condemns the New South Wales Government's failure in delivering effective mental health services for patients, clients, families and the community; and
- (3) calls for an inquiry into deaths related to inadequate mental health service delivery in New South Wales.

It is interesting that the Government has moved this motion. I suspect it is as a result of inquiries I have made to the Minister's office. Indeed, today I made a request to make a visit in two weeks to Macquarie Hospital, a large acute mental health bed unit in Sydney. I have put questions on notice about area health services throughout New South Wales and asked the Government to explain the number of deaths in mental health facilities of both voluntary and involuntary patients and to examine the issue of overmedication, which sometimes manifests in a syndrome known as neuroleptic malignant syndrome. People come to my office on a daily basis to speak to me as the shadow Minister. They are concerned that the service delivery by the Government is inadequate and they want improved services.

I will continue to meet with the non-government organisations. There are only three community-based facilities run by non-government organisations across the State. I was in Balgowlah two weeks ago visiting Pioneer House, which is a clubhouse model. I visited Tamworth last week and I will visit Wagga Wagga in two weeks. These non-government organisations try to work with the area health service teams. The community is crying out for the Government to address the huge gap—not hole—in services once people who experience mental health difficulties leave our acute system. There is no step up or step down program in New South Wales as there are in other States. There is no filtering up or filtering down of any consequence of mental health patients who require significant assistance or need transitioning back into the community.

This State has a fractured health system. That is manifest by the inadequate funding and coordination of our mental health system. More than \$13.5 billion is provided for health in this budget, which we know is not sustainable in the long-term, and well over \$1 billion is spent on mental health services. It is difficult to obtain the figures from the Government. I would say openly and confidently that the Government does not even know

what it is spending on mental health service delivery. The state of health under the Rees Labor Government is so dysfunctional that hospitals cannot pay their bills or manage their budgets. I suspect strongly, as does the industry, that the black hole in mental health funding has got bigger because money that is dedicated to mental health is being used to fill the black hole in acute health services in this State. The Minister did not speak to this motion. The Government is being disingenuous. The Government says that it is making a commitment and listening to the community but that is clearly not the case.

The Opposition always welcomes jobs in mental health and in any part of the community. We need a functioning bureaucracy, a functioning system. But in health everywhere I go there is a jobs freeze. The positions counted by the Government, particularly in health, are not being filled on the ground. I have met with the New South Wales Nurses Association on a number of sites and they have been very critical of the Government for not proactively advertising positions. When the Government says it is putting another 1,000 jobs into the system the community does not believe it because it cannot be seen on the ground. We know there is a jobs freeze. The Government has been making positions redundant for years. The Government is being disingenuous to expect trust from the community on this important issue.

A very important paper was produced last year called the "Future of Community Health Services in Australia". This benchmark paper articulates findings across Australia, including, poignantly, in New South Wales. One of the concerns noted in the paper, which is the benchmark in the industry, is the treatment of people when they are discharged from a mental health facility. That is the area where there are gaps. The Opposition is listening to the industry. As the Government knows, we are convening a roundtable of industry heads. We have met with them already and we will bring them together on a regular basis to help redefine our policy. We do not listen to backbenchers; we listen to industry, carers, patients and the experts in the field. Mental health is a serious issue and the community deserves better.

Ms MARIE ANDREWS (Gosford) [3.48 p.m.]: I support the motion moved by the member for Shellharbour. I will paint a vastly different picture of mental health services from the one painted by the member for Barwon. The delivery of more jobs in the mental health sector by the Government works to assist some of the most vulnerable members of our community. As members will be aware, Gosford is a vibrant and growing area. The Government's decision to focus strongly on youth mental health services in Gosford has not only helped provide new jobs but, importantly, has also delivered quality age-appropriate mental health care for the region's young people. The opening of YCentral has provided an essential health hub for young people in Gosford—a one-stop shop where they can seek treatment for their illness in a comfortable and relaxed environment.

We are doing more than just delivering bare health outcomes to young people and others living with a mental illness. The Government is constantly looking at ways in which people with a mental illness can lead productive lives and contribute to their community. The Government is not only boosting jobs for mental health workers; it is also helping people living with mental illness to re-enter the workforce through the Vocational Education, Training and Employment Service. This service provides vocational education, training and employment services to people living with mental illness and it has been successfully implemented in my local area health service. I am pleased to see that the Minister for Education and Training is in the Chamber.

Since the inception of the service more than 713 placements have been provided in the Northern Sydney Central Coast Area Health Service. Of those involved more than 72 per cent have recorded a positive outcome following the completion of their course. This is an outstanding initiative and is a hallmark of this Government's approach to mental health care. The Government is committed to ensuring that people living with mental illness are not nameless and faceless but instead are contributing and involved members of our community.

The Government's commitment to mental health care will continue this year with the ongoing development of the new mental health unit at Gosford Hospital. This new unit will deliver 30 new beds across a range of mental health services. The unit will include six observation beds, four vulnerable persons beds and 20 general acute beds. The Rees Government invested an additional \$4.7 million in the 2009-10 budget, and construction is well underway. This builds on the already expanded services on the Central Coast, which in the past five years have seen the number of mental health beds in the region more than triple from 25 to 80—a great improvement for the local community. These investments drive jobs growth and help to deliver real outcomes for people living with a mental illness, their families and carers. I commend the motion to the House.

Mrs JUDY HOPWOOD (Hornsby) [3.51 p.m.]: I support the motion by the shadow Minister for healthier lifestyles. This Government has been found wanting in the provision of services for people with a mental illness. I begin my argument by quoting from a July 2007 report entitled "Obstacles to Australian Health Reform" by John Menadue. The report concludes:

... we have a sickness model, not a wellness model, that the system is provider-driven, not client or community driven, that politicians only respond to vested professional interests, so we don't properly fund the Australian communities' priorities: mental health, indigenous health and physical risk factor prevention ...

That typifies the way in which this Government has overseen the management of mental illness in this State. It is an absolute disgrace. In the Hornsby electorate more than \$7 million was spent on the mental health intensive care unit. The unit was opened in March 2007 and it was empty for 11 months. It is closed again now because, I am advised, two patients have damaged its windows and doors. It is therefore not providing 12 essential beds for mental health patients. A relative of a mentally ill person came into my office recently and told me that his brother, who has bipolar disorder, had been in a manic phase but had not been admitted into the facility at Hornsby. His brother had been prescribed medication and sent away when he desperately needed to have that admission. The non-government organisations are picking up the bill for the mental health area, and they are doing a fantastic job, but they are under stress and strain.

I raise issues relating to homelessness. A good percentage of homeless people have a mental illness and I see on a first-hand basis many examples of the State Government not having adequately met the needs of homeless people with a mental illness—or the needs of people with a mental illness across the board. I remind the Government of the situation in the Shoalhaven area. For the past five to six years there have been promises with the area health clinical services plan that was endorsed by the then chief executive officer, Deb Piccone, who is now our Director General of Health. It is an absolute disgrace that those 12 to 15 mental health beds have not been opened in the area and that there are no mental health beds from Wollongong to the New South Wales border.

Mr ALLAN SHEARAN (Londonderry) [3.54 p.m.]: I support the motion and welcome the Government's investment in the size and skill level of the State's mental health workforce. The hardworking frontline healthcare workers deserve our praise and appreciation, especially the dedicated people who care for the health of people with a mental illness. Increasing the number of mental health workers and investing in their ongoing training is one of the most effective ways to improve mental health across New South Wales. I am pleased and proud to note that over the past few years the Government has already been responsible for a massive increase in mental health staff. An increase of more than 1,100 mental health staff added to the workforce since 2003-04 is a great achievement. I doubt that any other State in the nation can boast that kind of increase, and it has come about because of the leadership of this Government in addressing mental illness in our society.

Encouragingly, efforts to destigmatise mental illness have resulted also in an increased willingness of sufferers of mental illness to receive treatment. This focus on the mental health workforce continues. We recognise that attracting people to this sector of the healthcare workforce is very important. I am pleased that today the Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Mental Health) announced a brand new scholarship program in conjunction with the Mental Health Coordinating Council of New South Wales. The scholarship program includes \$1.56 million for career development opportunities in non-government organisations. This means that community-based mental healthcare workers are provided with additional professional training, making the jobs more attractive to recent graduates and improving the skill set of existing community workers.

Since 2004 more than \$24 million has been devoted to boosting inpatient and community mental health services. It is noteworthy to my constituents that western Sydney has been the particular focus of some of these resources. We now have more than 900 mental health beds across western Sydney. It is clear that the Government is serious about mental health and serious about mental health staff. The Walker Adolescent Unit at the Concord Centre for Mental Health is scheduled to open this month. I would love to draw a contrast between these achievements for the benefit of the people of New South Wales and the disappointing policy proposals of the Opposition, but the sad fact is that the Opposition is almost silent on its mental health policies.

Mental health ought to be one area that has bipartisan support. That is why the Government is investing so heavily in the mental health workforce and providing the kind of mental healthcare that New South Wales residents deserve. It would be good, responsible and appropriate if the Opposition got behind the Government's commendable initiatives to support the mental health workforce. People with a mental illness, and their families and friends, deserve the best possible care and treatment, and the Government has them firmly in mind. They are among the most disadvantaged members of our community and the Labor Government is dedicated to meeting their healthcare needs.

Ms LYLEA McMAHON (Shellharbour—Parliamentary Secretary) [3.57 p.m.], in reply: I will address some of the issues that have been raised by members in this debate. The member for Barwon discussed the politicisation of the issue of mental health. I draw attention to the amendment. If anyone is politicising this debate it is the Opposition. The Government supports action rather than words, it supports investment rather than nothing and it supports jobs rather than cuts. Every member on this side of the House supports this issue and is capable of contributing to this important debate dealing with people in our community who need assistance in their most vulnerable hours. Every member on this side is capable of contributing; we do not leave it to one member to speak. In addition, rather than talking, we are acting.

The member for Hornsby said that there are no services from Wollongong to the Victorian border. That is not true. Shellharbour Hospital has significant facilities for those with a mental illness. Other facilities have also been opened recently, including a 20-bed rehabilitation unit and a child and adolescent day unit staffed by 38 people. That is 38 new jobs. The member for Gosford made a valid point about the New South Wales Labor Government's support not only for mental health services but also for those with a mental illness, and particularly in ensuring that they are supported in living a full and rewarding life. The member brought to the attention of the House the vocational education and training courses from which 75 per cent of the participants go on to other activities. This Government does not simply talk about nameless, faceless people. It is concerned about those who have a mental illness and provides the services and support that they need. We have put our money where our mouth is by spending \$1.09 billion in this area.

Question—That the words stand—put and resolved in the affirmative.

Amendment negatived.

Motion agreed to.

ASSISTANT-SPEAKER (Ms Alison Megarrity): Order! Debate on the motion accorded priority having concluded, the House will now proceed to General Business Orders of the Day (for Bills).

TRANSPORT ADMINISTRATION AMENDMENT (COUNTRYLINK PENSIONER BOOKING FEE ABOLITION) BILL 2009

Agreement in Principle

Debate resumed from 13 March 2009.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST (Tweed) [4.03 p.m.]: The Transport Administration Amendment (CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee Abolition) Bill 2009 was introduced by the member for Willoughby. This is an important bill that seeks to abolish booking fees associated with pensioner travel on CountryLink rail and coach services. I believe this is an important piece of legislation because of the demographics of my electorate and the high percentage of CountryLink service users in the Tweed. I remind members that just on 27 per cent of the population in the Tweed electorate is over the age of 65. In fact, we have more people over 65 than any other of the 92 electorates in New South Wales, and this fee is a direct slap in their face.

The current CountryLink service to Tweed involves travelling by XPT from Sydney to Casino and then by coach to Tweed Heads. CountryLink services enjoy a high level of patronage in the Tweed. Pensioners, in particular, use the services to travel south to major city centres often for urgent medical treatment and to visit friends and relatives. Let us not forget that these are people who have worked all their life, usually in this State, who have paid their taxes and who have contributed to the success of New South Wales. However, this Labor Government has seen fit to continue to impose a fee that hits some of the hardest done by people in our community. These people live on fixed incomes and struggle from week to week to carve out a basic living and this Government is imposing an extra burden on them.

In March 2006 CountryLink applied a booking fee to pensioner travel vouchers. Under this arrangement pensioners using their travel vouchers to pay for their trip are hit with a compulsory booking fee equivalent to 15 per cent of the full adult fare for the entire journey or a maximum of \$10. That is excessive, even for a reasonably well off patron of CountryLink services. However, it is particularly harsh on pensioners, who no longer work full time and who must carefully budget how they spend their limited funds. We have heard

in this House in recent times about the global financial crisis and the effect it will have on our local communities. Once again, the Labor Government is so far out of touch with the general community feeling that it has imposed yet another tax—and this is a tax.

I challenged the Minister for Transport to explain the sense of imposing this booking fee on pensioners in July 2007. I argued that the Minister had failed to consult Tweed pensioners about the reasons for introducing this fee after scrapping the CountryLink XPT service to Tweed Heads. We do not have a train service to Tweed Heads; the Government saw fit to scrap it. As the member for Lismore well knows, 17 May is the fifth anniversary of the scrapping of that service.

Mr Thomas George: We will have a big birthday cake.

Mr GEOFF PROVEST: We will mark the occasion with a birthday cake. We have campaigned tirelessly about that service. Our colleagues in the upper House have released a cross-border transport paper. Then Premier Morris Iemma and his Queensland counterpart Peter Beattie commissioned a cross-border transport report. Obviously, the XPT would be an important part of that. Two years later we have a five-page document. The original media statement released by both Premiers stated that the high-level report would discuss the future of rail, road and public transport from now until 2025. That five-page report demonstrates how much the New South Wales Labor Government worries about the future, particularly of regional and country New South Wales.

I find it absurd that CountryLink patrons, who comprise one-third of all rail passengers in New South Wales, receive only one-tenth of government service subsidies and are sluggish with an unnecessary and unfair booking fee when passengers living in city centres using CityRail services receive more in subsidies but pay no additional taxes. In debating this bill it is important to acknowledge declining CountryLink patronage throughout New South Wales. An analysis of RailCorp's annual report shows that CountryLink patronage has declined from 1.9 million journeys in 2003-04 to 1.5 million in 2007-08. I have no doubt that the hefty booking fee has aided that decline in patronage, especially amongst pensioners.

The abolition of this fee would be a step in the right direction towards boosting patronage. We should be promoting train travel. We have often heard in this Chamber about the effects of climate change, global warming and so on. However, the Government has introduced a measure that will discourage people from using public transport. I am sure that abolishing this booking fee would boost CountryLink patronage back to the levels recorded in 2003-04.

It came to my attention recently that there has been a revamping of the ticket booking system in Queensland. This happened some months ago. At that time the Queensland Labor Government approached our Minister for Transport and offered to upgrade the ticketing system in our buses so it would be compatible with Queensland. It was told that New South Wales was not interested. Last year a pensioner could buy a ticket in Kingscliff and travel all the way to Robina for health services, no problem at all—one ticket would take that person all the way. But because of the failure, once again, of the Minister for Transport in New South Wales, that pensioner has to get off the bus in Coolangatta and purchase a full-fare ticket to travel the remaining distance in Queensland. The lack of coordination between Labor governments in Queensland and New South Wales is unbelievable.

Given that CountryLink has operated an e-ticketing system since 2006-07, I question the logic of keeping in place such a costly booking fee for full pensioners using the service. The system, referred to as the CountryLink reservation system, essentially allows passengers to book themselves on CountryLink services by means of the CountryLink website and permits payment by credit card or through a visit to a post office, negating the need to visit booking centres. In my mind it makes little sense to continue charging this hefty fee on pensioners when they are carrying out the majority of the booking process for their travel needs themselves. This is nothing more than an extra tax on the poor pensioners of New South Wales. As I said when this unfair fee was introduced, the Labor Government has public transport in the Tweed the wrong way around. It abolished our train service and introduced a booking fee; it should have abolished the booking fee and reintroduced the train service.

We continually push the needs of rural New South Wales because they are being neglected time and again in Sydney. There is more to New South Wales than Newcastle, Sydney and Wollongong. Many great people, including pensioners, have contributed to this fine State and they are continually stabbed in the back, hit in the pocket and treated like second-class citizens. I for one will not tolerate it, and I will continue to raise their case here, because once again I am 100 per cent committed for the Tweed.

Mr ANDREW FRASER (Coffs Harbour) [4.12 p.m.]: Today I speak to support the pensioners not only in my electorate but right across regional New South Wales. The Transport Administration Amendment (CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee Abolition) Bill 2009 defines a number of things. It states:

CountryLink means the business unit formed by RailCorp to operate non-metropolitan long-distance railway services and other transport services.

For those who do not know, Coffs Harbour is located halfway between Brisbane and Sydney. We have a high number of retired people, and a large number of those are pensioners. Quite often they travel away for medical reasons—and often they are not entitled to Isolated Patients Travel and Accommodation Assistance Scheme payments—or to visit family at Christmas or for birthday celebrations, and so on. The Government is placing an impost on those people by charging a booking fee. As I said, Coffs Harbour is approximately mid-distance between Brisbane and Sydney. The people who live in Coffs Harbour should be given similar opportunities to their city cousins. Pensioners in Sydney can use a pensioner excursion ticket, jump on a bus, train or ferry, and go wherever they want for \$2.50 a day. The bill also provides:

NSW/ACT pensioner means any of the following persons whose ordinary place of residence is in New South Wales or the Australian Capital Territory:

- (a) a person who receives a pension, benefit or allowance under Chapter 2 of the *Social Security Act 1991* of the Commonwealth, or service pension under Part III of the *Veterans' Entitlements Act 1986* of the Commonwealth, and who is the holder of a pensioner concession card issued by or on behalf of the Commonwealth Government,
- (b) a person who receives a pension from the Commonwealth Department of Veterans' Affairs as:
 - (i) the widow or widower of a member of the Australian Defence or Peacekeeping Forces, or
 - (ii) the unmarried mother of a deceased unmarried member of either of these Forces, or
 - (iii) the widowed mother of a deceased unmarried member of either of those Forces,

and who is the holder of a Transport Concession Card issued by the Commonwealth Department of Veterans' Affairs.

Penalising returned men and women, or widows or widowers of returned men or women, by charging them a booking fee to visit their families will not make a huge difference to the deficit that will be announced by this Government in its budget. However, scrapping that booking fee will give some equity to people living in regional and rural New South Wales who have to visit relatives and friends. In many cases the spouses of people living in country electorates may be buried in Sydney. It may be just an annual pilgrimage for some people to come down for Anzac Day or to visit the graves or memorials of their loved ones. If they want to travel by train, they will be sluggish by a booking fee. The people working in CountryLink are paid anyway. The booking fee makes no difference to their salaries and no difference to their time. These country people should be able to go in and book the seat, which supposedly is supplied free, without the impost of a booking fee. If memory serves me right, the booking fee is about \$30 for pensioners to travel from Coffs Harbour to Sydney and return.

Mr Steve Cansdell: It is \$30.

Mr ANDREW FRASER: Yes, \$30. These pensioners are not what one would call overly endowed with cash. As we have seen in the media of late, they are imploring Mr Rudd and, in his budget, Mr Swan to give them another \$30 a week. If pensioners get that \$30 a week increase, it will go in the booking fee if they wish to travel on CountryLink. Coffs Harbour is blessed. It has an excellent air service provided by both Qantas Link and Virgin, but a lot of elderly people will not fly. They enjoy the train travel; it is more relaxing, they can move around and arrive somewhat refreshed in Sydney. However, they are discouraged from travelling because of this \$30. All we are asking for is equity.

The member for Wollongong is in the House. People in her electorate are probably being charged this booking fee—or are they on the free rail ticket? Members of the Labor Party should be asking the same questions we are asking: Why are these people being penalised? They should be supporting the legislation of the shadow Minister. They should be rallying their Government to say that this \$30 fee is unfair. Most of these people are pensioners. The definition in the bill that I read earlier refers to returned personnel or widows or widowers of returned personnel. Surely some consideration must be given to the service they gave this country and they should be exempted. Other pensioners who have contributed to the wealth of this nation through their lifetime of work should be exempted, as should anyone with a disability. They should be given the opportunity to travel without this insidious \$30 fee. I commend the bill to the House.

Mr PETER BESSELING (Port Macquarie) [4.19 p.m.]: I speak briefly in support of the Transport Administration Amendment (CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee Abolition) Bill 2009. The objectives of the bill are to abolish the booking fees on the use of pensioner travel vouchers and passes on CountryLink rail services. Port Macquarie has a large elderly population with an average age of 44 compared with the State average of 37 years of age. Many of my constituents are pensioners and many of them struggle on a daily basis to meet their basic needs. We should provide every support we can to make their lives less stressful. The Government should certainly consider abolishing the booking fee that is imposed when they travel to see families, friends or even go shopping. We should not be penny-pinching but support them wherever possible.

I note that recently the Government introduced the RED [regional excursion daily] ticket scheme, which was well received in my area. Indeed, the patronage of the local bus company, Busways, has improved as a result of that scheme. The RED ticket scheme is excellent for country and rural areas, particularly Port Macquarie, Camden Haven, Kew, Kendall and Harrington. It is unusual that, on the one hand, the Government supports schemes for regional areas for people with concession tickets such as pensioners to be able to get around their electorates and to travel and, on the other hand, we still have this booking fee attached to travelling on CountryLink rail services.

I point out that the CountryLink service does not go through Port Macquarie itself; it cuts through Wauchope. Therefore, many people in my area must travel to Wauchope to catch the CountryLink train. This is an additional burden, especially for pensioners, who must arrange transport through family or friends. Those who do not have that luxury need to arrange a bus or even a taxi, which is an additional impost on people in rural and regional areas. I ask the Government to take that matter into account. The addition of those bus or taxi fares, on top of the booking fees, makes it difficult to encourage pensioners to catch the train and often they use alternative transport.

I have received a number of letters of complaint about this booking fee. The Government in its wisdom should consider abolishing the booking fee because it affects so many people in regional New South Wales. In particular, it affects those who do not have ready access to CountryLink services and must travel to other areas to access those services. I support the objects of the bill to abolish booking fees on the use of pensioner travel vouchers and passes on CountryLink rail services.

Mr STEVE CANSDELL (Clarence) [4.23 p.m.]: I support the Transport Administration Amendment (CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee Abolition) Bill 2009, which was introduced by the shadow Minister for Transport and the member for Willoughby, Gladys Berejiklian. This important amendment bill seeks to abolish booking fees associated with pensioners travelling on CountryLink rail and coach services. The demographics of northern New South Wales mean that this is an attack on elderly people, pensioners and the disadvantaged in country New South Wales, particularly residents in the Clarence whom I represent. People in country New South Wales are disadvantaged because they have no public transport. Pensioners in Sydney can jump on a train or bus and travel around the city at little or no cost. Country people do not have that luxury. People from the Clarence, the Richmond and Casino areas have to travel to southern areas to visit family and friends.

It is acknowledged that northern New South Wales is the fastest growing area in New South Wales, if not Australia, and many elderly people move from the city to the North Coast to retire. However, they still travel to Sydney to visit children, grandchildren and loved ones or to access medical services. This is not just a \$10 booking fee; it is \$10 or 15 per cent of the cost, whichever is the greater. A person travelling from Grafton or Casino to Sydney and return will have to pay \$30. This amount may not seem too much for people who work, but it is a significant amount to pensioners. Members of Parliament receive a reasonable salary so we would not mind paying \$30 to jump on a train. However, people on the minimum pension find this a great cost, which affects their living conditions and deprives them of necessities. I find it absurd that country patrons, who make up one-third of all rail passengers in New South Wales, receive only one-tenth of the government service subsidies. They are sluggish with this unnecessary and unfair booking fee. City passengers who use the CityRail service receive much more funding.

In debating the bill it is also important to consider the declining patronage of CountryLink services. When the booking fee was introduced in 2006 pensioner bookings decreased by 36,000 during the first six months. Without being too conspiratorial, one wonders whether this situation is similar to that of the Casino to Murwillumbah rail line. The Government promised not to close that line and to continue the service, but in 2004 Michael Costa just put the brakes on and shut down the line. With the drop in CountryLink patronage of 36,000, the Government might suggest that it is not worth keeping the service because the community is not supporting it. It might cut services or change schedules. Services would then be used less frequently because the times were

not convenient, such as trains arriving in Sydney at midnight or some other ungodly hour. Patronage would drop further, which is a great reason for Treasury and the Government, which is in dire financial straits, to cut the service altogether. Some would suggest the Government would not do that, but we said the same about the Casino to Murwillumbah service.

I can say this: The Casino to Murwillumbah service is not off the rails. It is still on track so long as the Government does not do anything stupid, like trying to sell off the land before the next election. Members representing the North Coast have been fighting hard for this service and to put pressure on the Coalition to go to the next election with a commitment to restore that rail service. People can travel anywhere they want in Sydney by train or by bus, but people in the country do not have that option. If a light rail system had six services a day, people could travel from Casino Lismore, Bangalow, Byron Bay, Mullumbimby and Murwillumbah. The Government would do this if it were forward thinking and considered the massive future growth of the North Coast and if it took advantage of capitalising on the tremendous tourism opportunities from Queensland. The Queensland Labor Government is a progressive Government that looks to the future, not the past.

The Queensland Government is seeking to grow its State, rather than simply hold government with spin and no substance. That Government is extending the rail to Coolangatta, so it can capitalise on the massive tourism opportunities generated by the airport at Coolangatta. Here is an opportunity for New South Wales to reinstate a light rail service from Casino to Murwillumbah, then extend that service by 20 kilometres to Coolangatta, and perhaps hook it up with the Queensland service. The Queensland tourism opportunities are there for everyone, including the people in this State. Links could be provided from the Tweed down to Murwillumbah, then from Murwillumbah to Mullumbimby, Byron Bay, Bangalow, Lismore and Casino, and then perhaps the service could be hooked up to the mid North Coast service.

I cannot understand a government that constantly talks progressively but acts negatively by simply wasting money, putting a lot of money into spin, and hiring spin doctors by the dozen. They are usually the spin doctors that got Carr up there and then jumped ship when he left—they jumped off the *Titanic*. They also helped Rudd get in. Now that he is there, they have jumped off again and they are trying to save the sinking ship. If they want to save a sinking ship and actually do something positive, they can say, "Here is a really good way to boost New South Wales, to start taking off Queensland instead of giving to Queensland." In New South Wales, with a stamp duty and all the other taxes, I think our State taxes are about \$2,600 per man, woman and child. In contrast, Queensland State taxes are about \$1,400 per man, woman and child. If you were running a business, why would you not jump the border and go to Queensland? Here is an opportunity for the New South Wales Government to grab some of that money back, by reinstating a rail link service from Casino to Murwillumbah, and then extending the service by 20 kilometres to Coolangatta, to take advantage of the tourism promotion that Queensland is engaging in to get people into that State.

The object of the bill is to scrap the pensioner booking fee. As I said earlier and as others have said, the fee is an impost on our elderly, the people who have worked their butts off and paid taxes all their lives. It is disgraceful that pensioners are hit with a \$30 booking fee to travel from Grafton to Sydney and return. As I said, these people travel to Sydney to visit family members or to see doctors and specialists. The fee is really hitting them. As the member for Coffs Harbour said, war veterans who fought for this country risked their lives. War widows—the women whose husbands have died through injuries sustained in the war—are the ones who are paying this \$30 fee. They are the ones the Government is hitting right between the eyes and in the pocket. The Government is taking away their standard of living. That money could go towards paying for their food, their doctors' bills, and many other things. The CountryLink booking fee is nothing more than a tax on the people in our society who can least afford to pay it. I support the bill introduced by the member for Willoughby.

Mr MALCOLM KERR (Cronulla) [4.33 p.m.]: It is interesting that not one member of the Government has defended the CountryLink booking fee. It is simply indefensible. As every member who has spoken in this debate has said, whether they be Independent members or Opposition members, the fee is an impost on the people who can least afford it. This is an attack on the aged in our community—the people who, in many cases, have fought for their country, people who all their lives have worked and paid taxes in order to ensure that the services the Government provides, at enormous cost to the taxpayers of New South Wales, can be sustained. These people fought to establish the great community we live in. Yet what does the Government do in response to their achievements? It hits them with an additional tax that they can least afford, at a time in their lives when they can least afford it.

The residents of my electorate have to pay CountryLink booking fees if they want to travel to country areas to visit family members. People who have moved away from the Sutherland shire and are now living in

country areas may want to return to Sydney to visit family members and friends here. The Government has inflicted social exclusion upon those people by implementing the booking fee. As members have said, the Government chooses to spend its money on projects such as a desalination plant. The Minister for Water, who is at the table, knows all about that.

Mr Phillip Costa: A great project.

Mr MALCOLM KERR: The Minister says, "A great project." It is a great pity that that great project will not be used unless the dam levels fall below 30 per cent. I can assure the Minister that the people of New South Wales cannot afford any more greatness from him. They are paying billions of dollars for his greatness. I can only describe the desalination plant as a great mistake. However, I will not be diverted from the leave of the Transport Administration Amendment (CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee Abolition) Bill 2009.

Ms Katrina Hodgkinson: How is the desalination plant going?

Mr MALCOLM KERR: The desalination plant is not going too well. I will speak about the desalination plant piping and a number of other issues on a later date. What is important here, however, is the cost that will be imposed upon the most vulnerable people in our community. The Opposition is all about providing hope and progress to the people of New South Wales.

Ms KATRINA HODGKINSON (Burrinjuck) [4.36 p.m.]: I fully support the Transport Administration Amendment (CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee Abolition) Bill 2009, which has been introduced by the member for Willoughby and shadow Minister for Transport. The member has introduced the bill on several occasions in the past. She introduced it in this House in October 2007. However, Parliamentary Counsel advised us that because the Government had prevented the bill from being voted on on at least three occasions it had to be resubmitted as a new bill this year. It was absolutely bizarre. Apparently it is the first time this has ever happened. It simply proves that clearly the State Government is extremely embarrassed by the subject matter and it does not want to go to a vote on the issue. The only change to the original bill, however, is the date in the title.

I congratulate the shadow Minister on pushing forward with the legislation. The issue has been brought to my attention on many occasions in my capacity as a member of Parliament representing a large rural-based electorate. A petition signed by many, many people was circulated throughout my electorate; it was extremely popular. Subsequently I presented the petition in this House. However, as we know, these days the Clerk does not read to the House the subject matter of the petitions that have been lodged; the petitions are simply printed in *Hansard* the following day. That spares the Minister of the day the embarrassment of having the petitions read out, which I am totally against. Often Opposition members call out, "Read out the petitions!" It is important that Ministers are faced with that additional pressure on the floor of the House, as to the issues raised in the petitions presented by members on both sides of the House.

The booking fee has resulted in pensioners being subjected to more than \$7 million in additional tax over the past two years. The booking fee is either \$10 each way or 15 per cent of the total fare, whichever is the greater. It is the sign of a very sick government when it goes to extreme measures to try to rip money out of pensioners pockets. Pensioners who are struggling come to see me in my office all the time, or when I do constituent interviews in the various towns of my electorate. With their hearts on their sleeves they say to me, "We are struggling to pay for our electricity bills. We are struggling to pay for our phone bills. We don't know if we can keep the phone on." In some cases they get rid of their phones. Pensioners are struggling to put petrol in their motor vehicles because the pension just does not go far enough for them. When they finally have to give up their car because they cannot afford to put petrol in it, they might not necessarily be able to access community transport when they need to in order to attend medical services or to get to another town to shop at a larger supermarket. They might want to travel to a larger centre to buy a special gift for a grandchild or a loved one. They might want to travel interstate, to Canberra or Sydney to attend a funeral or a special medical appointment.

This pensioner booking tax is really crippling the pensioners of this State—the most vulnerable in our society. Country members understand the hardships that the pensioners of their electorates face, but it is more difficult for their city counterparts to comprehend. People in the metropolitan area with Seniors Cards are able to access the CityRail network with a \$2.50 ticket, while country people must rely on CountryLink for transport between point A and point B and do not enjoy that advantage. The Government should recognise that country people who suffer from cancer or other serious illnesses have great difficulty in accessing medical services because of the tyranny of distance. I implore the Government to listen to the Opposition and scrap the

CountryLink booking fee. It is a terrible tax on pensioners who must rely on the only form of public transport in their areas and who are struggling to pay the fee. I know that many pensioners are going without because they cannot afford this insidious tax.

I have opposed the booking fee since its introduction. It is nothing more than a grab for the precious income of pensioners. If the Government were not so incompetent and out of touch its members would be in agreement with the Opposition, but they are very quiet on this matter. I have spoken about this matter at length since the bill was introduced in October 2007. The reintroduction of the bill by the Coalition sends a clear message to the Government that it has failed the people of New South Wales. The Government has introduced an unfair tax on pensioners. I call on the responsible Minister to abolish the tax. The Minister for Transport gets around in his nice, shiny, white car and he probably has a driver. He would also be on a very high salary and I assume he receives free travel. I ask the Minister to think about the pensioners of this State who struggle to get on a CountryLink service and who are being pressured to pay the additional booking fee or unconscionable tax.

With on-time running being so poor in New South Wales an additional tax can hardly be justified on top of the fares people already pay. From 1 September 2007, CountryLink fares rose by 4.8 per cent. For example, standard economy one-way travel from Sydney to Dubbo now costs an extra \$3.60, and from Sydney to Albury an extra \$4.70. From Sydney to nearly any rural area to which CountryLink travels, fare prices have increased. As at the date the member for Willoughby reintroduced this bill it was recorded that trains had run late 100 per cent of the time this year. What are people getting for their money? What is the Government all about? The Government is hell-bent on making those least able to afford it pay for a service that should be provided as a community service.

Mr GREG APLIN (Albury) [4.43 p.m.]: I support the Transport Administration Amendment (CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee Abolition) Bill 2009. I note the bill was previously introduced in October 2007. The bill stands in opposition to the unfair tax introduced by the former Minister for Transport and Deputy Premier; John Watkins. This legacy continues to embarrass the Government but it has not as yet found the gumption to support the bill and overturn the unfair tax not only on aged pensioners but also on pensioners who rely on the vouchers provided by the Government supposedly for free CountryLink travel. I speak of the two equivalent return vouchers provided to pensioners for travel anywhere in the State per calendar year.

It stands as an indictment of the Government that the people with these supposedly free vouchers are then required to pay either 10 or 15 per cent of the full adult fare for the equivalent journey each way, whichever total is the highest. That amount can be anywhere in the region of \$20 to \$50 for a single journey and the same for a return, depending on where they are travelling. That is one of the reasons why we have seen a decline of some 33 per cent in the patronage of CountryLink over the past six years. Not only has this fee affected the pensioners but also they, in turn, have dissuaded some of their relatives from accompanying them on their journeys. The vouchers were supplied in the first place to allow pensioners to visit their relatives, for leisure purposes, or to attend medical appointments or other businesses in Sydney, Newcastle, Casino or out to Broken Hill but they are now required to pay this unfair tax. It is not a fee: it is a tax. Also, if changes are required to be made to the original booking then pensioners must pay an additional administration fee.

Schedule 1 [1] to the bill makes it clear that an order fixing charges for services of RailCorp cannot impose a CountryLink pensioner booking fee, that is, a fee, however described, charged for or in relation to a New South Wales-Australian Capital Territory pensioner booking, a railway service provided by CountryLink using what would otherwise be a free travel pass, a concessional travel pass or a pensioner travel voucher. Schedule 1 [2] to the bill provides that RailCorp must not charge any pensioner booking fee for travel on a railway service provided by CountryLink. I support the bill and its intent of extending support to pensioners to access vouchers but they are then inhibited by this unfair tax imposed by the Government.

If that is not bad enough, incidents are regularly reported to me in Albury by my constituents, whether they be pensioners or normal full-fare paying passengers of CountryLink, that despite attempts some years ago to improve communication when trains are running late CountryLink staff have not yet found a way to inform passengers standing on platforms in the early hours of a cold winter's morning or late at night waiting for a train just how long the delay might be. This has been brought to the attention of the House before and it goes to the heart of what the bill and CountryLink should be all about. The Government continually fails the constituents of this State because it continues to fail to deliver good customer service.

It stands to reason that it is unfair to tax a free voucher: it is a contradiction in terms. In the same way, when you deliver a timetable it is a contradiction to regularly run late. If that were so then surely the obvious

answer is to change the timetable to reflect the delays that occur. I acknowledge that delays do occur sometimes and for good reason, for example, in summer when the tracks dictate there should be a slower running time. Good service and good community understanding is at the heart of the bill and at the heart of improving CountryLink services. I commend the bill to the House and I implore the Government to support the bill unilaterally.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [4.49 p.m.]: It is with pleasure that I participate in debate on the Transport Administration Amendment (CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee Abolition) Bill 2009. I thank the shadow Minister for Transport and member for Willoughby, Ms Gladys Berejiklian, for her determination in ensuring that debate on this legislation has continued. This legislation was first introduced in 2007.

Mr Richard Amery: When did you last travel by train?

Mr THOMAS GEORGE: Five years ago this week, and that is because the Government closed down the rail service. The North Coast no longer has a rail service. The last trip I took was well and truly documented—it was the last train from Murwillumbah to Sydney. I have not travelled by rail since. If the member for Mount Druitt would like more information about the Casino to Murwillumbah rail link I will give it to him. The Labor Government imposed a booking tax in 2006. It cannot be described other than as a tax. Ever since, pensioners have been forced to pay 15 per cent of the full adult fare, or a minimum of \$10. The Labor Party should be ashamed of itself for targeting the most vulnerable people in our community. The Government did not listen to their concerns when the bill was introduced in 2007. The State Government has continually deferred debate on this bill.

I presume the bill is before the House today because the Government has again run out of business. That is typical of this lazy Government. The Labor Government has not told pensioners how much money it has collected from this tax. In the first eight months of the tax the Government raised more than \$2.5 million. That is a substantial amount, given it is coming off the back of pensioners who find it hard to make ends meet, especially in these tough economic times. The Labor Government has failed to recognise that this tax has deeply affected the pensioner community. In its 2006-07 report the Independent Transport Safety and Reliability Regulator stated that the pensioner booking tax was responsible for a decline in patronage. Why would anyone want to travel by rail?

The north of the State does not have a rail service because on 17 May five years ago that wonderful member in the other place, the Hon. Michael Costa, was closed down. He took the rail service away from the people of the North Coast and replaced it with a bus service. It has been reiterated today on a number of occasions that the North Coast has the fastest-growing population in the State, particularly for independent retirees, pensioners and the aged. But what has the Government done to stimulate patronage of our trains? People from Murwillumbah, Mullumbimby, Byron Bay, Bangalow and Lismore now have to board a bus at Murwillumbah and travel all the way down the coast through Ballina, back up through Lismore and then over to Casino. Pensioners and the aged—anyone who wants to catch the train—have to travel by bus for up to 100 kilometres from Murwillumbah to Casino and for more than another 100 kilometres if they take the extended route through Ballina. The trip takes about three hours.

Travellers then board the train at Casino and travel to Sydney. On top of that, they have to pay a tax to travel by train. And the Government wonders why patronage has dropped off. Very few people use the CountryLink bus service, which is provided by a Queensland company. The buses have very few passengers because the service provided by the State Rail Authority does not encourage people to travel on them. The Government has done nothing to stimulate patronage on State rail. The social impact on the lives of our pensioners has been severely impacted by this tax. I do not refer only to the people on the North Coast but also those in many other electorates. The member for Barwon is in the Chamber. I am sure he will highlight the concerns of his electorate. The member for Murray-Darling, who was in the Chamber earlier—

Mr John Williams: I'm back.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! I call the member for Murray-Darling to order.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE: The member for Murray-Darling is back. I am sure the member for Murray-Darling will raise concerns in his electorate. The member for Orange is also in the Chamber. Other Coalition members will speak on the ramifications of the tax on people who live in country, regional and remote areas. If people in country and regional areas miss a bus or a train to go to the city they are finished for the day

and will have to come back the next day. If the member for Mount Druitt misses a bus, he will wait only 15 to 20 minutes for another bus. Country people do not have that privilege. When this tax was introduced in 2007 the shadow Minister issued a media release, which stated that the then Premier had indicated "that extensive consultation took place with pensioner groups before the booking tax came into force, and yet there is no evidence of this". In 2007 the shadow Minister asked the Minister for Transport and the Premier to provide evidence that such consultation took place. To this day we have not seen that evidence.

Mr Russell Turner: It took place in Mount Druitt.

Mr THOMAS GEORGE: It took place in Mount Druitt, did it? Furthermore, pensioners and other rail users regard this tax as unfair. It is a disincentive to use country services at all. Families are being denied precious time together because grandparents can no longer afford to travel. That is not right. Many young families have to move to city areas and their parents want to visit them. Whether they are pensioners or self-funded retirees they can do so, but they have to pay the tax. Hundreds of residents living in rural and remote areas of our State signed petitions opposing the booking fee. The Labor Government has ignored all the concerns that have been expressed by country and regional representatives. It has turned its back on them and continued charging this unfair tax. Once again, the Government has unfairly treated the many thousands of pensioners throughout the State, particularly those in the Lismore and northern rivers areas. The Coalition remains determined to abolish this unfair booking fee. I compliment again the shadow Minister for Transport for bringing this bill before the House. I am very pleased to support it.

Mr RICHARD AMERY (Mount Druitt) [4.59 p.m.]: I speak to the Transport Administration Amendment (CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee Abolition) Bill 2009. I listened to a couple of contributions by members of the Opposition and by way of interjection I asked when was the last time they had travelled on an XPT service, but I have not heard any answers. The booking fee has always been contentious and has been raised by Oppositions going back to the days when the Labor Party was in opposition and the Greiner Government introduced booking fees. People with various pension cards who travelled on CountryLink services were charged nominal fees for free travel. State Rail and CountryLink have always argued that the administration of the country rail service is far more complicated than that of the Sydney network— notwithstanding the volume of passengers and full-fare paying passengers on the Sydney service.

We should all support the maintenance of a very comprehensive and extensive CountryLink service. With all the very generous concessions provided to a number of travellers it is unfair for anyone to say that a booking fee is such an onerous payment if the Government feels that it is necessary. The member for Lismore said that we have raised \$2.5 million. If every person used the CountryLink service and paid the full fare, which they do not, and if every seat on every service were full, which they are not, that service would still require a substantial amount of government assistance. It is not as though the Government is trying not to cover the cost of country rail services, and bus and coach services, which are of a very high standard; we are making only some reference to mitigating the cost of the service.

On 19 April my family and I made a trip to Surfers Paradise. My family went on an aircraft but I took it upon myself to buy a ticket and travel the day before on the overnight XPT service. The reason I speak on this bill is to compliment the staff of that service on the high-quality service offered to passengers on that train. Also, I compliment everybody involved on the refurbishment of that train. Obviously the train from Sydney to Brisbane has had some major renovations; it was of an extremely high standard. I got on the train at 4.30 p.m. on the Saturday afternoon and I arrived in Brisbane at 6.15 a.m., 15 minutes ahead of schedule. Service on the XPT was excellent and I commend those involved. The train was packed. It was pleasing to see so many families with young children on the train. I have no doubt that that extra patronage and the large patronage—

Mr Thomas George: It was going to Queensland.

Mr RICHARD AMERY: A lot of people got off at country stations along the way.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! The member for Mount Druitt has the call. He does not need any encouragement from the member for Lismore.

Mr RICHARD AMERY: People were encouraged to be on that train by the very generous policy announced by the Minister for Transport recently, which provides that children travel free when accompanied by a full-fare paying passenger.

ACTING-SPEAKER (Mr Wayne Merton): Order! I call the member for Tweed to order.

Mr RICHARD AMERY: I compliment CountryLink for running an excellent service to Brisbane. If the train I travelled on is an example, it is consistent with train travel I have undertaken on the CountryLink Explorer. Much more is involved in running a country service over such a long distance than is involved in the running of a commuter train service in Sydney.

Mr RUSSELL TURNER (Orange) [5.04 p.m.]: I speak to the Transport Administration Amendment (CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee Abolition) Bill 2009. I thank the shadow Minister for Transport, the member for Willoughby, for reintroducing this bill. As has been noted by other members, the bill was first introduced in 2007. I will address briefly some of the comments of the member for Mount Druitt. I agree that the system is expensive to run, but so is the whole of the CityRail network and the city buses and the city ferries, which are all continually subsidised. We are not talking about the quality of the XPT. Nothing is basically wrong with the XPT. I acknowledge that it has been upgraded, or is going through an upgrade at the moment. I travelled on the XPT only a couple of months ago from Sydney to Orange when yet another Rex airline service was cancelled.

It was an enjoyable trip at that hour of the morning. I was looked after very well and the meals were quite nice. It was only perhaps the line that let the train down. As we know, the train is capable of travelling at 160 kilometres an hour, which I understand it does out near Penrith, up the other side of Wellington and also on one small section near Spring Hill, outside of Orange. It is not the fault of the train that the service is not supported as it should be. As other members have acknowledged, the booking fee has led to a decline in patronage. Many people have told me that they would love to travel on the XPT, but they cannot put up with the behaviour of some of the passengers using filthy language and throwing food around. That tends to happen on the later trains when people have had a few drinks before they get on the train.

As I said, on the early morning train the behaviour of the passengers was quite satisfactory. But people have repeatedly told me that they would like to travel on the XPT and other train services but they cannot handle the bad behaviour of a minority of people on those trains. The Government should look into that issue. If it wants extra patronage on these trains it has to control the behaviour of a small minority of passengers. Many people have come into my office since 2007 to complain that Orange is out of the CityRail network. If they wish to travel on the electric train system down to Sydney or perhaps visit relatives up on the North Coast—even on a CountryLink bus—they have to pay booking fees. Two booking fees have to be paid to travel down to Lithgow to get on the CityRail network to travel down to Sydney. As soon as they leave the CityRail network to go up to the North Coast another two \$10 booking fees have to be paid. When they come back they have to pay another two \$10 booking fees to go through the CityRail network again. Then there are another two \$10 booking fees to go from Lithgow back to Orange. They are up for a minimum of \$80 in booking fees for, technically, a \$2.50 ticket.

Something drastically wrong and it is discrimination against country people. As we know, if a person is eligible for a Seniors Card or is on a pension card he or she can travel all over Sydney for \$2.50. People can get onto the train, onto the ferry, off the ferry, onto a bus, all day for \$2.50, but country people cannot do that. It is nothing but discrimination against country people and it is a deterrent for people to travel on public transport. Many people, even though they cannot afford it, would prefer to travel by public transport but they are forced to travel via their own transport. The other deterrent is the deterioration of the rail line. The morning I went back to Orange on the XPT it was quite pleasant up to about Bathurst. From Bathurst it took 1½ hours to get to Orange, purely and simply because of the track on the other side around Blayney, up through Newbridge and through to Spring Hill before the line opens up again.

This train, which is capable of travelling at 160 kilometres an hour, creaks and groans around the corners at speeds of between 40 and 50 kilometres an hour. It became painful between Bathurst and Orange. That is yet another deterrent to train travel. If this Government is keen to get people back to public transport it must examine that situation as well. People are reluctant to use public transport and the booking fee is one of the strongest deterrents to people around Orange and west of Orange. I know many people whose children take them to Lithgow to get on to the CityRail system so they do not have to pay the booking fee or to suffer the tedious trip around the other side of Blayney.

I commend the shadow Minister for reintroducing this bill—and I certainly commend it. I hope, but I doubt, that the Government will consider it sympathetically. Members opposite seem to be obsessed with country people not getting the same deal as people in the city. The Government does not appear to have realised

the impact on the overall cost of travel if passengers break their CountryLink journey by transferring to a CityRail service. Country passengers cannot get a return fare, which means they must break their journey and thus are subject to another booking fee, and that is despite the fact that both systems are run by the State Government, which says that it is looking after the country people and people using public transport. That is certainly not true as far as country people are concerned. I repeat: If the Government wants to attract people back to public transport it should abolish the booking fee, address behaviour on trains and, wherever possible, upgrade lines so that trains can reach the speeds at which they have been designed and engineered to travel.

Mr JOHN WILLIAMS (Murray-Darling) [5.12 p.m.]: For many people in rural and remote New South Wales the past 10 years have been exceedingly difficult, primarily due to the prolonged drought. That drought has seen a mass exodus of young people from their hometowns in search of employment opportunities, most commonly to larger centres hundreds of kilometres away from where they grew up and where their parents still live. This change in population distribution means that many older people are now separated from their children and grandchildren by great distances. In this day of fractured family units, with members living in different towns and cities and leading increasingly busy lives, it is important for all family members that they be able to spend what little quality time they can together. CountryLink pensioner travel vouchers have for many years now provided pensioners with the opportunity to travel on CountryLink trains and coach services up to four times each calendar year. Those vouchers have been a godsend to pensioners as the cost of living has dramatically increased in recent years and day-to-day expenses have skyrocketed.

When this Government announced that from 1 March 2006 it was introducing a booking fee for pensioners using their pension travel vouchers a great deal of concern was expressed by pensioners from across the State. That booking fee, which this Government may see as nominal, was set at 15 per cent of the full adult fare for the entire New South Wales section of the journey or a minimum of \$10. For pensioners living in coastal centres dotted up and down the eastern seaboard 15 per cent of a full adult fare to see their family members further up or down the coast is not a great outlay. They may in fact see it as an acceptable figure.

However, for people in rural and remote centres such as those in the Murray-Darling electorate 15 per cent of the full adult fare can be a significant amount. For example, for a couple living in Broken Hill who have family they wish to visit in Port Macquarie the booking fee is \$28.40 per person per trip, or an additional \$113.60. In today's world, if you are a pensioner couple living off benefits only that is more than 12.5 per cent of your fortnightly combined gross income. To some people an additional \$113.60 may seem like chicken feed, but to people living in rural and remote areas, where the cost of everyday items is high because they have to be transported over great distances from larger centres, that extra cost could be the deciding factor in whether or not they take their first trip in two years to see their grandchildren. A trip from Tocumwal in the south to Armidale would attract a booking fee for a pensioner couple of \$242.10 or almost 27 per cent of their combined fortnightly income.

I ask this Government how it thinks it is fair to slug pensioners—people who in all likelihood have worked their guts out for more than 40 years—with a booking fee on their travel when it claims to be in good financial shape itself. This action is bully-like: it is the action of someone bigger hurting someone smaller simply because they think they can get away with it. This is not a new fight for The Nationals. In September 2003 the New South Wales Nationals leader Andrew Stoner stepped up to the plate for rural and remote pensioners, stating that an interim report by this State Government into the funding of public transport had recommended a raft of changes, including an increase in pensioner fares. Country senior citizens already pay at least double the fares paid by city senior citizens. They often have to travel long distances to major regional centres, not only for recreational or family-related reasons but also to access medical and other vital services.

Pensioner travel voucher usage has dramatically decreased since the CountryLink pensioner booking fee was introduced. Tens of thousands fewer pensioner travel vouchers are being used annually. I suggest that is most directly attributable to the increased cost of travel since the booking fee was introduced. The fee has caused a decrease in the number of tourists visiting Broken Hill, which relies on tourist income. This Government claims it is in a strong financial position, which is more than can be said for many pensioners. If that is the case, the Government must reconsider this unfair and mean-spirited attack on pensioners and abolish the CountryLink pensioner booking fee it introduced on 1 March 2006.

Mrs DAWN FARDELL (Dubbo) [5.18 p.m.]: I will speak briefly on the Transport Administration Amendment (CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee Abolition) Bill 2009, which was introduced by the member for Willoughby. I support Coalition members' comments about this bill. If we had a superior rail service I do not believe that people would mind paying for it. It is expensive to travel on trains in Europe but it is not uncommon

to see staff cleaning the carriages every 30 minutes, and they also have train guards. I am sure people do not mind paying a bit extra for that kind of service. I have received many representations about this issue over the past couple of years, particularly from Combined Pensioners and Superannuants Association members Joan Teale and Keith Farrinds—two very hardworking members—who have been long-time lobbyists about this fee. I recall speaking to former Treasurer Michael Costa about this issue. He said, in his usual manner, "Okay, I will get rid of the booking fee, but the XPT will go as well." That was the end of the conversation.

We are fortunate to have the XPT service to Dubbo, but we must remain constantly alert to ensure the carriages are not reduced from four to three. Fortunately, people in the system ring me if there is a threat of a carriage being dropped off or the class of a carriage is changed. Many rail, motel and zoo packages have been introduced. The booking fee makes them costly, particularly when more than one person is travelling. Many people taking up those packages are families and pensioners. Very rarely do I see a single mother on QantasLink or on the Rex plane. There are two reasons for that: first, they cannot afford it and, second, there are probably too many health bureaucrats going for their twice-weekly meetings in Sydney when they could use teleconferencing. We need to use the XPT. When it is not available there are problems. Many people then have to drive to Lithgow or travel by coach to Lithgow to use the electric system. They are still hit with a booking fee.

Many health patients, for example, prefer to travel by coach—which is not real cheap—or the XPT, particularly male prostate cancer patients, who find it unpleasant to travel by air. With the cost of accessing services, the low return from the Isolated Patients Transport and Accommodation Assistance Scheme [IPTAAS], the cost of accommodation when they get to Sydney, being hit with a booking fee as well makes it very expensive for them. A recent example of the lack of transport services in Dubbo affected Bruce, who came to me only last week. He is well known for selling raffle tickets around the area. He was told by his doctor that he had to be in Orange Hospital this week and he had to find his own way there. This is a fellow with special needs. He is unable to drive, and we do not have a regular bus service. The timetable of the XPT did not allow for that, so Bruce was told by the health service that he could go with the community transport system. That was going to cost \$130 because the service had to pay for the driver to stay overnight to bring him home the next day. If a more satisfactory rail service were available he would not have to cop this.

He was told that no IPTAAS assistance was available to him as it already subsidised the community transport and could not subsidise Bruce as well. A kind soul who knew Bruce, one of the stalwarts of the Dubbo football club, picked up the fee. Great advice given to Bruce by the Greater Western Area Health Service was to go to Centrelink and ask for an advance on his Centrelink payment for the next fortnight! I do not know what he would have done when he subsequently received a payment \$130 short. If his doctor had been smart and booked Bruce into the hospital in Dubbo the night before he possibly could have got the frequent transport to Orange and back. I commend this bill. I call on the Government to support the bill. The Government has to stop thinking that there are no votes for it past the Blue Mountains. It forgets that people in small villages access the XPT service. They come from far and wide to Dubbo to catch this service. All those people have family and friends who live throughout New South Wales, and they vote as well.

Mr KEVIN HUMPHRIES (Barwon) [5.23 p.m.]: The overview of the Transport Administration Amendment (CountryLink Pensioner Booking Fee Abolition) Bill 2009 states that the object of the bill is to abolish booking fees on the use of pensioner travel vouchers and passes on CountryLink rail services. I commend the member for Willoughby for bringing forward this bill, as well as those members who have spoken today from both sides of the House. I commence my remarks by thanking the staff of CountryLink rail services. The member for Orange raised the issue of supervision and behaviour on CountryLink services. Only last week I received a letter from a constituent in Moree who was very unhappy with the standard of behaviour. My good friend Norm Bender, a CountryLink rail driver who lives at Werris Creek, gives me constant updates on the state of rail passenger services and maintenance issues. One thing always of concern on CountryLink services is the level of supervision and the behaviour that is accepted by the Government through lack of supervision on those services.

It all goes to passenger usage and how we build capacity on transport. I find it hypocritical that members of the Government look down their noses at country people, saying that they subsidise us for this and for that. The sum of \$3.5 billion is spent on transport services in this State. The majority of that funding is subsidised, well over \$2.5 billion. Transport is not self-recovering. The majority of the subsidies are in the city, not the country. Tomorrow I am going to Mount Druitt. If I were a pensioner I could travel all around the system for \$2.50, and if I missed the first train from Wynyard I would be able to catch another dozen. As the member for Lismore said, we do not have that privilege. When this tax was introduced the Government did not

understand the seamlessness required for transport services in New South Wales. Government members tried to get their heads around it when they tried to introduce a Tcard, which was a lazy \$100 million fiasco, and there is no mention of that from the Government.

As the member for Murray-Darling rightly said, because we do not have seamless transport connections, to travel from Broken Hill to Port Macquarie requires a series of connections and a number of rebookings, and the poor old pensioner is up for almost \$130 in booking fees. The same could be said of travelling from Tocumwal through to Armidale. A series of connections will sometimes cost up to \$200 in booking fees. For pensioners and particularly self-funded retirees, who are not subject to the \$10 minimum, that is an inordinate amount of money. When the Government introduced this tax it really did not understand its implications. Not only is this a tax on pensioners and hardworking people who have contributed to this country, it is also setting up a two-standard system. As we have heard today, to live on the western side of the sandstone curtain is a disadvantage if we are being discriminated against. There are many good things about living in the country, but this is purely about discrimination.

Not only do we have a fractured service in New South Wales, with an unfair tax burden being placed on pensioners, part-funded retirees and anyone of a senior's age wanting to use the rail system, but some people in the State are now not accessing lifesaving treatment. Recently my electorate, which is a considerable part of the State, lost its air services. Bourke—this is a bit of a history lesson for the Government—was opened on the Darling River by the advent of paddle steamers in the 1880s. To an extent, paddle steamers opened up the inland and gave people access to a port in South Australia. That brought in migration and development. In the 1890s there was the advent of rail. The rail service to Bourke opened up the inland of Australia, and this was recorded by Henry Lawson. When Henry Lawson wrote "If you know Bourke, you know Australia", he was writing about hardship, about the efforts people made in infrastructure development in this country during the early Federation years.

The bridge over the Darling River opened up more road transport in the early part of the century. In the 1950s we had an air service. Today we have lost our air service to Bourke. The bridge over the Darling River has been replaced, thank God. We have lost our rail service. The army blew up the rail line between Nyngan and Bourke as part of an experiment on an exercise, so we have no rail. We have gradually lost the services that have been built up over 100 years. It is a disgrace. Expansion and development increases with infrastructure, but we are now seeing a retraction of services and infrastructure, and therefore population and development, in the western part of New South Wales. Thirty years ago pensioners used to be able to access life-saving treatment by rail. They can longer access health services from Bourke or Cobar—flights were lost out of Cobar. Pensioners in the more remote areas used to have a regular service—we have gone backwards, not forwards—and this is detrimental. It is discrimination against people living in rural and remote areas, who are vulnerable.

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

PRIVATE MEMBERS' STATEMENTS

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

LAKEMBA ELECTORATE NEEDS AND SERVICES

Mr ROBERT FUROLO (Lakemba) [5.30 p.m.]: As members of Parliament and leaders in our communities, families, mums and dads, the elderly, children and young people, the disabled and disadvantaged rely on us. They rely on us to firstly understand their needs and work through the mechanisms of our Parliament to meet them. I outline some of the challenges faced by my community and the services and facilities we need to meet these challenges. The challenges have been outlined through the release of the City of Canterbury's demographic profile.

The electorate of Lakemba is located almost entirely in the City of Canterbury and the challenges identified in this document are consistent with those faced in my electorate. The demographic profile identifies that my community has a significantly higher population density than all other councils in New South Wales with populations over 100,000, except the City of Sydney. There are 3,868 people per square kilometre in Canterbury and 5.1 per cent of all family dwellings are home to six or more people, compared with 3.8 per cent for the Sydney average. Combined with this high-density of living is the seriously low household income levels.

Around one-quarter of all households have a combined weekly income of less than \$500 per week—for housing, food, clothing, bills, schooling and all the other costs of living. It is not surprising then that nearly 40 per cent of low and moderate income earners experience housing stress compared with around 30 per cent for the rest of Sydney. There are also many more renters living in my electorate, with 36 per cent of people renting their dwellings. The very high density of population, very low levels of income and a high proportion of renters and people experiencing housing stress mean that affordable housing is a critical issue in my community.

While Housing New South Wales and local social housing providers work hard, housing security and affordability is a critical issue facing residents. Families on low incomes living in overcrowded accommodation, many with limited education and language skills, face enormous challenges, especially for their children. With six or eight family members living in a two or three bedroom unit, where do the children go to do their homework? How do children in these families get to use our wonderful education system to give themselves a chance to move beyond poverty? What is needed is a clear recognition of these problems and a concerted effort to address them.

Helping to meet the needs of the young, the elderly and disabled are the wonderful community and volunteer organisations, as well the services provided through local council. However, it is the fantastic work of our local neighbourhood centres that are the backbone of my community and many other communities. The challenges of this age and the culturally diverse community require greater resources in supporting our neighbourhood centres. Centres such as the Canterbury City Community Centre and the Riverwood Community Centre need their community services program grants to reflect these local challenges. Whether its targeted education services, more affordable housing options or funding for community centres, I will be fighting to make sure the people of my electorate get the share they deserve.

ALCOHOL ABUSE

Mr MALCOLM KERR (Cronulla) [5.34 p.m.]: Once again I speak on an issue that affects my electorate, that is, the use of alcohol and the resultant violence and antisocial behaviour. I spoke about the need for a community forum on this problem so that all sections of the community have their say on the matter. Sutherland Shire Council has produced a draft strategy on alcohol abuse, although I note that the draft strategy was released some months ago. The *St George and Sutherland Shire Leader*, a great metropolitan newspaper, held a youth forum on that draft strategy. It is interesting to hear views of young people when they were brought together. Tim Dunlop, a member of the Sutherland Shire Youth Council, said those involved with drafting the strategy ignored the input of shire youth. He stated:

It (the strategy) is clearly just generic and stereotyped ... They didn't ask us (Sutherland Shire Youth Council) for any consultation before compiling the (draft) strategy.

I personally believe that it is negligent of them in overlooking us. Youth can voice an opinion that is valid and that holds weight.

I certainly agree that youth can hold an opinion that is valid and that holds weight. The Mayor of Sutherland shire, Lorraine Kelly, said:

The strategy is only a draft, it was just to get the ball rolling and get councillors aware of it ... We will be changing it as we go, making sure we receive input from other groups and members of the community.

It is essential that other groups and members of the community get to have a say. I ask the question: What are the groups and what members of the community will be provided with the opportunity to have a say and what is the timetable for doing this? Sam de Brito explored the problem associated with drinking in an article in the *Sun-Herald* on 19 April 2009. In it he stated:

Yet how many mates, relatives and colleagues do we have who are killing themselves on the drink, ruining a relationship or are in danger of losing their job and we say nothing because it's almost taboo to interfere with the sacred Australian right to get [drunk].

The article refers to the fact that in Australia we do not have the same drinking culture that they have in Europe. It is not a matter of alcohol consumption; in Europe the alcohol consumption is quite high. But, unlike Britain and Australia, it does not lead to the same sort of antisocial behaviour. We require a civilised drinking culture. I have said that the fines for drinking in alcohol-free areas are ridiculously low. They are not worthwhile enforcing and are no deterrent. From my electorate's point of view, I am very concerned at the suggestion that the Government wants to deal with people suspected of being "noticeably drunk". As the *Daily Telegraph* points out, often people have a medical condition and will slur their words. That could be mistaken for symptoms of

drunkenness, which could have tragic consequences. The Government claims to be acting against drinking during beach parties because of sudden safety concerns, yet there is no evidence of any widespread problem with beach drinking. As the *Daily Telegraph* said:

There is an obvious difference between running a civilised and pleasant community where obnoxious and violent drunks are dealt with and running a mini-police state where a few drinks land you in serious legal strife.

NEWCASTLE YOUTH LEADERSHIP FORUM

Ms JODI MCKAY (Newcastle—Minister for Tourism, Minister for the Hunter, Minister for Science and Medical Research, and Minister Assisting the Minister for Health (Cancer)) [5.39 p.m.]: In a recent letter to the editor of the *Newcastle Herald* a young writer expressed her dismay at sometimes feeling "weighed down by the bad actions" of others, continuing on to say that "for every news report about the deteriorating behaviour of youths, there are many unpublished stories about young people who are doing the right thing". Unfortunately, representations of youth in the media tend to be dominated by negative themes, focusing on drug and alcohol abuse, violent crime, driving offences, graffiti and vandalism. It is a case of a negative minority receiving the most attention. Today I acknowledge the young people in my electorate who are doing the right thing, who want to make a positive contribution to Newcastle and are perhaps not receiving the attention they deserve.

During National Youth Week last month it was my pleasure to host the Newcastle Youth Leadership Forum 2009. I introduced this forum last year and decided to make it an annual event following positive feedback from students. The forum provides an opportunity for school captains and prefects in my electorate to learn about their role as leaders and directly communicate to me what they believe Newcastle needs now and into the future. A leadership coach facilitated in the forum, guiding students through a range of exercises and group discussions to define the qualities of leadership, identify students' personal leadership style, and create a vision for the future of Newcastle. Most importantly, the Newcastle Youth Leadership Forum provides an opportunity for youth leaders to collectively identify and list their priorities for a new Newcastle.

Some identified priority areas included: revitalisation of the city centre through improved use of existing assets and public space; development of an integrated public transport system, removing the heavy rail line into the city and introducing light rail or trams, with links to cycle ways and points of interest; the introduction of targeted youth programs and venues that appeal to specific age groups, as opposed to viewing youth as a single demographic; the expansion of a whole-of-community drug and alcohol education program; the provision of funding for youth venues that allow access to live music and entertainment in a safe, drug-free and alcohol-free environment; support for youth leadership by creating greater access to decision-making processes and encouraging initiative—one suggestion being to include "junior votes" on issues specifically affecting young people—increased security and lighting in the city, to make residents and visitors feel safe and welcome, and to reduce the incidence of violent crime and vandalism; and the development of interschool programs to foster relationships and encourage social inclusion.

I was most impressed with the level of maturity, enthusiasm and understanding displayed by the 20 public and private senior students who participated in the forum this year. I am pleased to say that Newcastle's youth leaders are intelligent, articulate and passionate about the future of their community. We must support our future leaders. The best way to do that is to help them realise the positive contribution they can make to their community and to empower them to act.

PAYROLL TAX

Mr THOMAS GEORGE (Lismore) [5.43 p.m.]: I raise an issue I have continually pursued in this House and have sought to have addressed by the Government, without success. Now that New South Wales is experiencing negative economic growth on the back of the Government's disastrous mini-budget, and that the Premier and his Government have demonstrated they have no plan to protect New South Wales jobs and businesses, I again place on record the alarming fact that it is still much cheaper to do business in Queensland than in northern New South Wales.

The Premier continues to speak about what he is doing with payroll tax in this State. Last year the Government said reforms to payroll tax would be fully phased in by January 2011. However, New South Wales payroll tax will still be 5.5 per cent with a threshold of about \$700,000, compared with today's Queensland payroll tax rate of 4.75 per cent with a \$1 million threshold. This probably does not mean much to a lot of people. However, to many employers who are competing against their counterparts over the border, it means

that a Northern Rivers business with a \$900,000 wages bill will pay \$54,000 this year and \$49,500 in 2011. In contrast, a similar size business in Queensland with exactly the same payroll pays nothing. Yet the New South Wales Government continually says it is doing something with payroll tax.

We need to provide support to businesses that need support in these tough economic times. The result is that Queensland contractors come into New South Wales, quote against New South Wales contractors, and get the jobs. This is extremely damaging to the communities of the North Coast, and especially to contractors who are competing with those across the border. I have records, which I sent to the former Treasurer, showing that builders in the Lismore and Murwillumbah areas have lost New South Wales Government jobs, which have been afforded to Queensland companies. The reason for that is the extra payroll tax and extra cost of workers compensation in this State. What is the Government's plan to combat the problem of payroll tax? Labor simply does not have a plan. I call on the Government to support the Coalition's proposal of cutting payroll tax by 15 per cent. The small business people and tradespeople in this State, particularly in cross-border areas, are simply not able to compete with their counterparts across the border in Queensland.

When we ask ourselves why this has happened, there is one simple answer: there is no support for New South Wales companies. In one of his answers today the Premier gave a self-glowing report about how he has attracted a \$90 million movie to New South Wales. The Premier was able to do that through a payroll tax subsidy. Why do new businesses receive the subsidy yet the employers of this State who have supported the State for a number of years do not receive any relief? It is appalling that the Government does not support existing businesses. Too often when governments come to office they want to help new businesses get started but at the same time they forget the businesses that have operated year in and year out supplying employment to people within this State.

Business owners in my electorate of Lismore should not be penalised for choosing to be based there and do business in New South Wales. They need encouragement—and they certainly have not been getting any from the New South Wales Labor Government. Although the Government does not have a plan to deal with the loss of business in this State, the Opposition does. I call on the Government to support the Coalition's proposal of reducing New South Wales payroll tax by 15 per cent, to provide some relief to employers who have operated their businesses in northern New South Wales and cannot continue to compete against their counterparts across the border, who have better payroll tax conditions. It is a disgrace that the Government does not answer their plea.

Mr PHIL KOPERBERG (Blue Mountains—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.48 p.m.]: I remind the member for Lismore, whose comments I respect considerably, that 90 per cent of small businesses in New South Wales pay no payroll tax whatsoever. As an encouragement to existing businesses, they are exempt from the payroll tax provisions.

BLUE MOUNTAINS POLICING

Mr PHIL KOPERBERG (Blue Mountains—Parliamentary Secretary) [5.49 p.m.]: I wish to pay tribute to the efforts of police in my electorate. According to the Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research, vigilant policing has resulted in all of the 17 major crime categories either falling or remaining stable over the past two years. Locally, there have been reductions in four major crime categories. Stealing from dwellings is down by a massive 29 per cent, stealing from retail stores is down by an equally large 27 per cent, break and enter offences are down by 26 per cent, and domestic violence related to assault is down by 16 per cent. I am particularly pleased to note—and I thank the Government—that the Blue Mountains Local Area Command is at full strength, with 114 officers.

Observations from my community regarding the increased presence of highway patrol and engagement with local businesses and community groups have been extraordinarily positive. Recently, in response to community concerns about the drivers of passenger and freight vehicles breaching road rules on the Great Western Highway, the local area command conducted Operation Mega Daylight over the weekend of 28 and 29 March. That was a massive undertaking. Members who know the Great Western Highway as it runs through my electorate of the Blue Mountains will appreciate that it is the subject of many road upgrade projects, it is a difficult road to negotiate and it carries heavy volumes of traffic.

Operation Mega Daylight resulted in some 520 vehicles being stopped and drivers being spoken to, 125 traffic infringements were issued, two weapons were seized, 3,513 random breath tests were conducted and seven drivers were charged with drink-drive offences. In addition, a number of defective vehicles were taken off

the road. To give members some indication of how the safety of other road users is often put in jeopardy, one driver was stopped after being detected driving at 153 kilometres per hour in a 60 kilometres per hour zone. By any measure this was a monumental effort on the part of local police, for which they have community gratitude.

Policing on commuter trains through the Blue Mountains has also increased and has yielded good results, with a number of arrests being made for antisocial behaviour. More importantly, there has been an arrest of a person who has been charged with one or another form of assault. The efforts by police to make train travellers through the Blue Mountains feel safer are yielding good results. On the Easter weekend the police rescue squad were also very active. One of the few remaining rescue squads operates in the Blue Mountains. That squad conducted nine search and rescue operations in the bushland surrounding the townships of the Blue Mountains that weekend.

It is impossible for me to name every officer in the local area command. Suffice it to say they are all doing a fantastic job and I acknowledge the great work of the Local Area Commander, Superintendent Tony McWhirter, and those who have gone before him, and that of crime manager Detective Inspector Mick Bostock, who is currently the acting Local Area Commander. In very difficult circumstances police remain determined to provide a safer environment for communities. They often deal with many complex issues and much accountability and there is no finer example of this than those police who work in the Blue Mountains Local Area Command. I commend their efforts to the House.

CURRAWONG HERITAGE LISTING

Mr ROB STOKES (Pittwater) [5.52 p.m.]: I acknowledge the tremendous efforts of so many people within my community of Pittwater in achieving a pivotal victory in the campaign to save Currawong. While this precious heritage place has been under threat of intensive redevelopment for more than 30 years, the latest and most serious threat to this historic and sensitive waterfront bushland arose in mid 2007 when developers Ecovillages Australia Pty Ltd and property owner Unions New South Wales submitted an application to subdivide Currawong into 36 allotments, including 34 separate dwellings. Despite a recommendation from the Heritage Council of New South Wales that all of Currawong be listed on the State Heritage Register, the proposal to rezone, subdivide and redevelop Currawong was "called in" under the notorious part 3A planning laws for a personal decision by the Minister for Planning. The future of Currawong looked very bleak indeed.

Yet, in a powerful display of community action, the ministerial panel appointed to advise the Minister on Currawong received almost 300 individual submissions opposing the redevelopment and more than 500 submissions supporting the heritage listing of Currawong. Almost 100 people made personal presentations to a public hearing on Currawong, and more than 1,500 people attended rallies and public meetings in Avalon, Mona Vale and outside State Parliament. Around 1,000 people signed petitions, and countless others wrote directly to the Minister for Planning. An impressive list of experts and peak bodies also gave their support to the campaign to save Currawong. It is therefore no surprise that the expert panel on the heritage significance of Currawong not only endorsed the Heritage Council's recommendation that Currawong be listed on the State Heritage Register but went even further, finding that Currawong met six of the seven criteria for State significance—when meeting just one of these criteria is enough to warrant inclusion on the register.

The independent panel on the development proposal vindicated community opposition finding that, "the current development proposal should not proceed" and "no adequate justification has been provided to demonstrate that the land should be rezoned as proposed". Confronted with such overwhelming opposition, the Minister had no real choice but to refuse the proposal to rezone, subdivide and redevelop Currawong, and to include the entire site on the State Heritage Register. Of more than 460 development proposals assessed under the part 3A planning laws, Currawong is one of only two proposals to have ever been refused. I am certain that the strong and united action of the Pittwater community and the Friends of Currawong, led by the indomitable Shane Withington, was absolutely vital in achieving this victory.

The long-term threat to Currawong has not been completely removed but we have won a critical victory. The decision means that for any future development proposal the whole site will be on the State Heritage Register; the consent authority will be Pittwater Council and not the Minister for Planning; the development footprint of the site has been slashed, water must be provided on-site, and stormwater management must preclude the need for any landfill; any new development must be single-storey and in the style of holiday cottages; and public access must be provided throughout the cabins, the foreshore and the valley floor. These conditions, taken together, severely constrain the development potential of Currawong for residential subdivision.

While I acknowledge and thank the Minister for Planning for making the right decision to refuse the crazy, unsustainable plan to rezone, subdivide and redevelop Currawong, I note that the whole campaign, the cost, delay and red tape, could all have been avoided but for the part 3A planning laws. Because the proposal was prohibited under established local planning rules the same result would have been achieved, without huge cost to the taxpayers of New South Wales, the ratepayers of Pittwater, not to mention the costs to Unions New South Wales and the developer. This is a clear example of why the Opposition has signalled that it will repeal part 3A and simplify our planning laws.

So what now for Currawong? A unique opportunity may now exist for the Government to acquire Currawong on behalf of the people of New South Wales. Currawong Beach, with its heritage as a workers' holiday camp, would make an ideal location for a State park. Camping and picnic facilities at the adjacent Basin camping area are under immense pressure, and are often inadequate to meet demand, especially during summer. A State park at Currawong Beach would provide an attractive alternative for campers and day-trippers from all across New South Wales and enable them to enjoy the beauty of Currawong, an opportunity that would only have been available to a privileged few if the recent development proposal had been approved.

The fact that it is now clear that residential subdivision and exclusion of the public are not appropriate outcomes for Currawong Beach will certainly reduce the value of the site to private development interests, meaning that it is an ideal time to obtain the entire site at a reasonable price for the benefit of everyone in New South Wales, particularly future generations. This is an exciting opportunity, and I urge the Minister for Planning and the Minister for Lands to take it. All our children will thank them.

CENTRAL COAST CAMPUS TWENTIETH ANNIVERSARY

Mr DAVID HARRIS (Wyong) [5.57 p.m.]: This year marks 20 years since the first classes commenced at the Central Coast campus of the University of Newcastle at Ourimbah, which serves my electorate. This significant milestone gives the community the opportunity to reflect on the growth of higher education in the region over that time and the importance of having access to high-quality educational services on a multi-sector campus. The campus began in 1989 with just 60 students. This was after many years of planning and discussions.

Over the past 20 years the campus has undergone significant growth and today has more than 7,500 students undertaking vocational and higher education programs that are jointly delivered by the University of Newcastle, the Hunter Institute of TAFE NSW, and the Central Coast Community College. It employs more than 200 staff. This in itself is of great importance to our area as it provides people with a multitude of opportunities to enhance their education without the need to travel great distances. The extensive list of courses and degree programs are presented in an idyllic rainforest hideaway type of setting. This year nearly 1,000 students graduated. I was pleased to attend the graduation ceremonies that were held earlier this year.

It is significant that the campus is located at Ourimbah—an indigenous word that means place of learning. The site is located on the traditional lands of the Darkinjung people where learning took place. Years ago, before any construction or digging was begun at that campus, a cultural survey of the site was undertaken and the buildings and areas have since been constructed around those sites. This year—2009—will be an exciting year of celebration for the campus as a variety of community events and special projects have been planned. One of these events is a "Picturing Ourimbah" art competition sponsored by the Central Coast Watercolour Society, the Central Coast Arts Society and John Ralph's Camera House. A debating competition will also be held and the celebrations will culminate in a formal dinner on 24 July this year.

These celebratory events have been coordinated with the support of the Twentieth Anniversary Committee, which comprises representatives from the university, TAFE NSW, the Central Coast Community College, government, the sporting community, and members of the broader community. On Sunday 22 March this year I had the privilege of attending the commemorative tree-planting ceremony. The ceremony began with a welcome to country by representatives of the traditional owners of the land—the Darkinjung people. Nicholas Saunders, Vice-Chancellor of Newcastle University, and Phil Cox, institute director for Hunter TAFE, turned the first sod and planted the Wollemi pine that was kindly donated by Lee Rowan's Gardenworld.

The event included a guided tour of the surrounding landscape by Gaby Duncan and Kerry Patterson from the Darkinjung community. To commemorate the event, Wyong and Gosford local councils also gave away free seedlings to ratepayers. On 15 April I also attended an education and training forum entitled "A Smarter Central Coast." The multi-sector campus hosted the event, which was attended by more than

50 people from education, local, State and Federal governments, private businesses, professional groups, charities and youth organisations. Linda Cooper, the university's executive officer, said that all who attended shared a passion to see what else could be done to improve study and work options, and thus life choices, for the local community as part of building a smarter Central Coast.

Penny Jane Burke, Professor of Education from Roehampton University in the United Kingdom addressed the forum. Professor Burke is internationally recognised through many awards for her groundbreaking ideas and publications on educational participation and access. It was great to be part of the lively and positive discussion between forum participants who were keen to make a difference to people's lives on the coast. The university plans to host follow-up activities and events to keep this energy flowing. Professor Stephen Crump, Pro Vice-Chancellor, spoke enthusiastically about the outstanding development of the Ourimbah campus over the past 20 years. He sees this educational institution as having the brightest of futures and he believes it serves, and will continue to serve, the growing community of the Central Coast well. I take this opportunity to congratulate the Ourimbah campus of the University of Newcastle not only for its contribution to the Central Coast over the past 20 years but also for its continued commitment to grow, improve and serve our community.

MACLEAN DISTRICT HOSPITAL SECURITY

Mr STEVE CANSDELL (Clarence) [6.02 p.m.]: Today I refer to an issue that I have brought to the attention of the Premier on a number of occasions during question time—much to the chagrin of the Speaker as it invited a number of interjections—that is, the heartless sacking of 400 full-time positions from the North Coast Area Health Service. The sacking of two people highlight the total incompetence and insensitivity of the New South Wales Labor Government and the hired assassin and grim reaper from the North Coast Area Health Service, chief executive officer Chris Crawford.

Two of the jobs that were cut involved two positions—security and cleaning. The main issue to which I wish to refer today is security, even though cleaning is important in a hospital for hygienic reasons. The people formerly employed in these positions gave much-needed support to and in-house security for night staff working at Maclean District Hospital. I am sure that most members remember the horrific murder in December 1994 of 20-year-old Sandra Hoare, a nurse who worked at Maclean District Hospital, by cousins Brendon and Vester Fernando. Sandra was working alone in the geriatric ward at Walgett hospital when she was viciously raped and murdered by those two adults.

That incident was a catalyst for ensuring that there was adequate night security in hospitals right across this State. In legal action against the State, Sandra Hoare's mother subsequently claimed that the Far West Area Health Service failed to provide a safe workplace, thus exposing her daughter to risk. This tragedy highlighted the need for night security at all hospitals to afford our hard-working nurses the protection they require to perform their work in a safe and secure environment. I have raised this issue with Chris Crawford and I have been told, "Do not worry about it because staff will be given duress alarms." However, duress alarms do not inform those who are receiving the alarm signal exactly where those who are under duress are located in the hospital or in the hospital grounds. People could be attacked in a toilet, outside the building or anywhere else.

Without the in-house security that was provided by those two security and cleaner positions, hospital staff will have to rely on local security firms that patrol the whole of the lower Clarence area, or they will have to rely on 24-hour-a day, seven-day a week police stations. The nearest police station is located 45 kilometres away in Grafton, which is a 40-minute drive from the hospital. If anyone at Yamba, Iluka or Ashby needed urgent support that support would be a minimum of 10 minutes away. I have received correspondence from workers and people associated with the hospital who have told me that when problems occur it is normally as a result of people affected by alcohol or drugs. Such people are not in a position to handle logic and often they become violent. I will read onto the record a note of what one of the men who works at Maclean District Hospital said to me:

Mark has worked at the hospital for 11 years as security/cleaner/wardsman. Very dangerous place with many incidents at night. Example, 2 guys just out of prison tried to break into Accident and Emergency at night and Mark had to come and give support.

Five nurses are on night duty at Maclean District Hospital—two in one ward that has 28 beds, two in another ward that has 14 beds, and one in accident and emergency. If help were required, one nurse would have to come down from one of the other wards. If there were a death and nurses needed help to move a patient to the morgue or they needed help to move a patient from one bed to another, the security cleaner would give nurses a

hand. It is imperative that these positions remain. It is insensitive and bloody incompetent of the Government and the area health service to remove this security and safety network for our nurses, especially when we take into account the 1994 murder of Sandra Hoare and the lack of support that was available then.

LIVERPOOL AUSTRALIA DAY CEREMONY

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.07 p.m.] On Australia Day 2009 I was privileged to be at the Whitlam Centre in Liverpool and to hear Father Chris Riley speak. He was there for a mix of ceremonies—an Australia Day ceremony and a citizenship ceremony. Father Riley could have gone anywhere but he chose to be in south-west Sydney. Also present at the ceremonies were the Hon. Paul Lynch, MP; Chris Hayes, MP for Werriwa; Allison Megarrity, MP; the Mayor of Liverpool, Wendy Waller; and many Liverpool councillors. I believe that the views expressed in Father Riley's speech deserve a wider audience, so I would like to share them with the House and with the people in my electorate.

We need to debate the significance of Australia Day and the inclusiveness or lack thereof that the Australian flag is now chosen by some in our community to represent. The first thing that Father Riley spoke about was the provocative nature of the day and what it represents to the 4 per cent of people that identify as being indigenous. He congratulated Professor Mick Dodson for his statements as Australian of the Year. I also support Mick's call to have a conversation about the meaning of this day. As one who has worked in Aboriginal health for many years I know that this day has a dual meaning for many indigenous people. Father Riley then spoke about the need for true reconciliation for all people across this land. He said that we need:

A reconciliation that must embrace the oneness of humankind—a celebration of what is common between us and an action that calls every human being to look every one we meet in the eye and embrace them as a brother or a sister.

He also spoke about the need for social justice in the context of the global financial crisis:

We face this crisis because of greed. As I look around our country there is surely enough for everyone. But the absolute lives of privilege lived by some means there is not enough to go around. The gap between rich and poor is widening.

He called for the values of universal respect for every individual, inclusiveness and sharing the wealth of the nation, and love for all. As our much-loved former Governor General Sir William Deane said:

We will be judged as a Nation by the way we care for the most vulnerable and disadvantaged.

As Barack Obama said:

We cannot help but believe that the old hatreds shall some day pass; that the line of tribe shall soon dissolve; that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself and that each and every individual must play his or her role in ushering in a new era of peace.

What do those thoughts mean to the people of Liverpool? For them, as for my family, Liverpool is the land of opportunity. For them Australia Day is a day to reflect and celebrate what is common between us so we can embrace our diversity. After the ceremony our friends from Liverpool Lions manned the parking area. I met the volunteers from Casula Bush Fire Brigade, about whom I have spoken in this place, as well as other community groups, such as, the Liverpool Robins athletics club. Later I had a swim in the fantastic Wenden pool. I watched four members of three generations of a local family sitting by the pool laughing, enjoying their time together and playing cards. They all had Australian flags plastered on their faces. They were speaking Arabic. Liverpool has a rich and vibrant tapestry. We are so lucky to have each other because it is in the shadow of each other that the people live. I very much thank Father Riley for his thoughts and presence on the day. His friendship, courage and wisdom, and his wonderful continuing help in my electorate are very much appreciated by all.

EPPING TO CHATSWOOD RAIL LINE NOISE

Ms GLADYS BEREJIKLIAN (Willoughby) [6.12 p.m.]: I raise a very important issue in the Willoughby electorate, that is, the noise experienced by local residents from the Epping to Chatswood rail line. Many local residents have contacted my office about the impingement on their quality of life since the new rail line opened. Many residents who have lived along the North Shore rail line for decades said that the noise from that line had not bothered them. Yet since the new rail line has opened, every 15 minutes they experience noise at a level that affects their quality of life. Some residents work from home, and many residents have said they have been unable to open doors or windows since the new rail line opened. It is an unacceptable situation. One would expect that a new rail line opened in 2009 would be more sensitive to environmental issues and more

considerate of the impact on residents than a rail line opened a century ago. More than 400 residents have signed a petition about the noise, and I understand many others will sign. The petition, which is addressed to David Campbell, the Minister for Transport, states:

This Petition of the residents of Chatswood brings to the attention of the Minister and the Government of New South Wales that:

We are suffering from the offensive and intrusive noise created by the Epping-Chatswood Rail Link since its commencement of operation from 23 February 2009. These include (1) roaring noise, (2) squealing noise, (3) excessive and apparently unnecessary horn blowing when there is no sign of workers on the line. The ECRL noise by reason of its level, nature and character interferes with the use and enjoyment of our homes. The ECRL noise is causing irritation, annoyance, distress and sleep disturbance to the residents. In contrast, the noise from North Shore Line is almost negligible except that the noise is louder for the section where the tracks are laid on concrete slab instead of ballast.

The undersigned petitioners therefore ask the Minister of Transport to direct RailCorp to address the noise issue urgently and implement mitigation measures to reduce the excessive noise emissions from trains, tracks and other structures on the Epping-Chatswood Rail Link network. The most critical area is between Help Street and William Street in Chatswood.

I have met with local residents and visited them in their apartments when the train is whizzing past. I can attest to the extreme noise and the concerns that the new rail line is causing for residents. As I said, many of them have lived peacefully alongside the conventional North Shore rail line for decades. But the Epping to Chatswood rail line has caused them enormous angst. I cannot believe that a Government in this day and age would allow a new rail line to be much noisier than an old rail line. I have written to the Minister about this and I am forwarding the petition to him. I also bring to the Minister's attention the concern of local residents that the relevant State Government authorities have refused to provide to them the noise level readings. To date, the Minister has not said when the noise test results will be released to local residents.

The residents feel that their concerns are being ignored. Further, they do not understand why the State Government did not advise them beforehand that they would experience such a difference in their quality of life. Even now, after it is apparent that the new rail line is causing enormous angst, the Government refuses to release figures on the noise decibels and the action it will take to mitigate the noise. I thank all the residents who contacted me and for bringing this issue to my attention on a regular basis. I assure them today that I will continue to advocate on their behalf and pursue the State Government and the Minister for Transport in particular to ensure that immediate action is taken to mitigate the noise.

One local resident contacted me today to say that although RailCorp told residents the noise issue would be resolved, that has not happened and the noise is as bad as ever. Although the rail line has been open since February, it is still causing major problems for the residents. I cannot believe that the quality of life of residents was not even considered when the rail line was opened. I cannot believe that residents were not consulted about the impacts on them. I cannot believe that the Government is not taking necessary action to deal with residents' concerns. In addition to thanking the residents, I thank the local media who have supported the residents and the local communities in surrounding areas who have come to the aid of residents. As I said, I assure the residents that I will continue to pursue this important matter on their behalf.

SISTERS OF CHARITY

Ms CLOVER MOORE (Sydney) [6.17 p.m.]: Tonight I acknowledge more than 170 years of achievements and contribution by the Sisters of Charity, women motivated by their vow of "Service of the Poor", to help poor and disadvantaged people, and to fight for social justice and the environment. Founder Mary Aikenhead established the Sisters of Charity in Dublin in 1815. Five courageous Irish Sisters arrived in Sydney on 31 December 1838, the first religious community of women to arrive in the penal colony. Their vocation to care for people who were poor and in need was vital when Sydney had very little in the way of government or civil society. The Sisters had a hard time in Australia, with 10 young Sisters dying in the first 20 years. They barely had enough money to sustain themselves, let alone support those in need. However, they proved to be visionary and resilient.

One of their first tasks was to work in Parramatta Gaol, where up to 800 women lived in degradation and misery. The Sisters established sewing rooms and a laundry. In 1840 the Sisters of Charity settled in Burdekin Terrace in College Street, opposite Hyde Park. They visited poor and sick people, gave religious instruction in six Sydney Catholic schools, and conducted needlework and adult evening classes. The Sisters visited Darlinghurst Gaol and the Sydney Infirmary, which later became Sydney Hospital. The Sisters founded St Vincent's Hospital in Darlinghurst in 1857 and were committed to the development of St Vincent's Private Hospital when it opened in 1909. St Vincent's Hospital was the only institute in the colony run by women and funded by colonists during the first half of the century. It trained some of the earliest nurses in Australia.

St Vincent's Hospital has grown into a leading medical, surgical and research institution of world-class standing. It has the Garvan Institute and Victor Chang Cardiac Research Institute and leads research work in dementia, disease inheritance, HIV, mental illnesses, diabetes and cancer.

During the mid 1990s I fought with the local community to oppose the New South Wales Government's plans to close this vital health facility. In keeping with the Sisters' values, St Vincent's Hospital led the country in helping gay men, street sex workers and injecting drug users affected by HIV-AIDS during the worst of that health epidemic. The hospital continues this work. The 2002 building redevelopment provides world-class facilities. A new combined mental health, alcohol and drug, and community health facility is being built. About 400 volunteers support the Sisters and paid staff to help care for patients.

The Sisters provide vital help to people with alcohol and drug problems through the Gorman House detoxification service, which I have supported through my Lord Mayoral Salary Trust. The Sisters bravely offered to run the Kings Cross Medically Supervised Injecting Centre to save the lives of injecting drug users. After intervention from church hierarchy they had to withdraw this service, which was taken over by the Uniting Church. The Sisters of Charity played an important role in the development of Australian education, teaching in eight schools in Sydney for their first 20 years in the colony. They taught young workers in night classes and ran free public libraries and of course Sunday schools. They opened St Vincent's Primary School at Potts Point in 1858 and also ran 40 schools throughout the four eastern States.

St Vincent's school in Potts Point set the norm for secondary schools that followed, pioneering the De La Salle methodology in Australia and helping young women sit examinations for the Civil Service. Their students were among the first graduates from the University of Sydney. The Sisters established colleges in Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane and Hobart, and taught in more than 30 schools. I am pleased that my Lord Mayoral Salary Trust is also helping to support indigenous students at this school. The Sisters of Charity Outreach Project looks beyond the hospital and inner city with counselling and referral services, court support, childcare and accommodation for country people visiting for study or hospital appointments. In 2006-07 the Sisters of Charity Foundation provided \$463,887 for 38 community welfare projects.

The Sisters of Charity are impelled by charity, which St Paul called the greatest of the virtues. Charity in its broadest sense of caring for others remains their motivating force. They continue to help, clothe, feed and visit poor people and alleviate affliction, and they continue to go beyond practical help to be in solidarity with those near the bottom of society. They are committed to empowering poor and oppressed people, working with them, rather than on behalf of them, to change unjust economic, social and political structures and overcome social injustices. I thank them for their effective work with the Sydney community. It is commendable that five courageous women arrived in the colony in 1838 and started all this work that has had such an important impact on Australia.

Dr ANDREW McDONALD (Macquarie Fields—Parliamentary Secretary) [6.22 p.m.]: I too pay tribute to the Sisters of Charity and thank the member for Sydney for bringing their work to the notice of the House. The Sisters of Charity have been a beacon for fairness and social justice in Australia since their arrival. My grandfather was a consultant at St Vincent's Hospital, my mother was a nurse and my father a physiotherapist. Without St Vincent's I probably would not be here. I look forward to representing the Premier at the one hundredth birthday celebrations tomorrow for that private hospital. The sisters continue to lead the way in compassion and advocacy for those in greatest need. I commend them to the House.

GLEN INNES CORRECTIONAL CENTRE

Mr RICHARD TORBAY (Northern Tablelands—Speaker) [6.23 p.m.]: Recently I visited the Glen Innes Correctional Centre, which is a model for other correction facilities throughout the State. It is an innovative facility where the male prisoners interact easily with staff and each other, learn skills, are exposed to learning opportunities and are assisted to find work using their acquired skills when they have completed their sentences. As well as a beautiful setting the centre offers a homelike atmosphere with small residential huts that are largely self-catering, as well as access to training at the sawmill, the recycling plant, the kitchen, the commercial vegetable garden, the restoration of old machinery and community work. In the computer laboratory they can build their literacy and numeracy skills through special programs. Some inmates come to the centre with very poor literacy and numeracy. Other inmates with more advanced skills can take bridging courses to prepare for tertiary studies. A number of successful programs involve the University of New England where inmates have undertaken preliminary courses at the centre and then moved on to study on campus at the end of their sentences.

The centre was established in 1928 as the Mount Mitchell Afforestation Camp, comprising approximately 3,500 acres, not far from Glen Innes on the Grafton Highway. Accommodation was provided for 52 offenders with previous convictions as well as selected prisoners convicted in the northern districts of the State. Now the Glen Innes Correctional Centre houses up to 150 minimum-security inmates. The extent of the activities at the centre is remarkable. It has embraced environmental sustainability through measures including establishing earthworm farms to consume the centre's green, vegetable and shredded paper waste. Start-up kits are now being supplied to other correctional centres throughout the State. The ban on burning sawmill waste has resulted in the production of mulch sold as a water-wise garden product on the commercial market. Action has been taken to ensure no leaching of waste materials from the sawmill into the local creek. The centre has assisted also in the removal of feral cattle, feral cats and invasive weeds threatening the local environment.

Inmates employed at the Community Project Nursery collect seeds and cuttings from local native trees and grasses. These are propagated and donated within the community to support biodiversity. The centre has a recycling program to reduce landfill and an effective stormwater management plan. A transfer station manages all centre waste. It also has programs in place for pesticide, chemical and air quality management. The centre's Agriculture Business Unit reprocesses sawmill waste into potting mixes and landscape materials that are sold commercially. Currently, building construction works are underway to complete two accommodation units for 18 additional inmates. The work is being conducted in-house, training inmates in those new skills.

The major employer within the centre is the sawmill and under current plans the number of positions will increase from 65 to 100. To achieve this the centre has applied to Forests New South Wales for a log allocation increase from 15,000 to 25,000 green metric tonnes. For some time the Department of Corrective Services has been developing new markets for its products in line with the proposed log allocation increase. This has involved modifying its milling practices and sourcing the latest technology in sawmilling to ensure an appropriate response based, of course, on advice from Forests New South Wales. Over the past 80 years the department has developed a strong working relationship with Forests New South Wales, and this has seen the sawmill become the major focus within the centre. The centre needs this increased log allocation to offer sufficient employment to inmates, to purchase up-to-date equipment and to meet current occupational health and safety regulations. It would also lessen operating costs and waste.

The updated equipment would enable inmates to undertake Certificate III in Sawmilling traineeships, making it more likely for them to find work after release. It is well established that inmates who have received a combination of basic education and relevant vocational education are less likely to return to custody after they have served their terms. As well, Forests New South Wales plans to liquidate the Mount Topper and Copeton State Forest areas in the Inverell area. Corrective Services has requested these be transferred to establish a satellite work centre aligned to the Glen Innes facility. This centre would enable inmates to engage in silviculture traineeships, plantation management and community projects. I urge the Minister for Primary Industries to make a formal commitment to these initiatives to progress the inspiring work and rehabilitation of inmates at the Glen Innes Correctional Centre.

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

Private members' statements noted.

**The House adjourned, pursuant to sessional orders, at 6.28 p.m. until
Friday 8 May 2009 at 10.00 a.m.**
