



COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

# HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

## Votes and Proceedings

## Hansard

**MONDAY, 12 FEBRUARY 2007**

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**Monday, 19 February 2007**

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### SITTING DAYS—2007

Month	Date
February	6, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14, 15, 26, 27, 28
March	1, 20, 21, 22, 26, 27, 28, 29
May	8, 9, 10, 21, 22, 23, 24, 28, 29, 30, 31
June	12, 13, 14, 18, 19, 20, 21
August	7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16
September	10, 11, 12, 13, 17, 18, 19, 20
October	15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25
November	12, 13, 14, 15, 26, 27, 28, 29
December	3, 4, 5, 6

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**FORTY-FIRST PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION—EIGHTH PERIOD**

**Governor-General**

His Excellency Major-General Michael Jeffery, Companion in the Order of Australia, Commander of the Royal Victorian Order, Military Cross

**House of Representatives Officeholders**

*Speaker*—The Hon. David Peter Maxwell Hawker MP

*Deputy Speaker*—The Hon. Ian Raymond Causley MP

*Second Deputy Speaker*—Mr Henry Alfred Jenkins MP

*Members of the Speaker's Panel*—The Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams, Mr Phillip Anthony Barresi, the Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen Bishop, Ms Ann Kathleen Corcoran, Mr Barry Wayne Haase, Mr Michael John Hatton, the Hon. Duncan James Colquhoun Kerr SC, Mr Harry Vernon Quick, the Hon. Bruce Craig Scott, Mr Patrick Damien Secker, the Hon. Alexander Michael Somlyay, Mr Kim William Wilkie

*Leader of the House*—The Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP

*Deputy Leader of the House*—The Hon. Peter John McGauran MP

*Manager of Opposition Business*—Mr Anthony Norman Albanese MP

*Deputy Manager of Opposition Business*—Mr Kelvin John Thomson MP

**Party Leaders and Whips**

Liberal Party of Australia

*Leader*—The Hon. John Winston Howard MP

*Deputy Leader*—The Hon. Peter Howard Costello MP

*Chief Government Whip*—Mr Kerry Joseph Bartlett MP

*Government Whips*—Mrs Joanna Gash MP and Mr Fergus Stewart McArthur MP

The Nationals

*Leader*—The Hon. Mark Anthony James Vaile MP

*Deputy Leader*—The Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP

*Chief Whip*—Mrs Kay Elizabeth Hull MP

*Whip*—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP

Australian Labor Party

*Leader*—Mr Kevin Michael Rudd MP

*Deputy Leader*—Ms Julia Eileen Gillard MP

*Chief Opposition Whip*—The Hon. Leo Roger Spurway Price MP

*Opposition Whips*—Mr Michael David Danby MP and Ms Jill Griffiths Hall MP

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives

### Members of the House of Representatives

Member	Division	Party
Abbott, Hon. Anthony John	Warringah, NSW	LP
Adams, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry	Lyons, Tas	ALP
Albanese, Anthony Norman	Grayndler, NSW	ALP
Anderson, Hon. John Duncan	Gwydir, NSW	Nats
Andren, Peter James	Calare, NSW	Ind
Andrews, Hon. Kevin James	Menzies, Vic	LP
Bailey, Hon. Frances Esther	McEwen, Vic	LP
Baird, Hon. Bruce George	Cook, NSW	LP
Baker, Mark Horden	Braddon, Tas	LP
Baldwin, Hon. Robert Charles	Paterson, NSW	LP
Barresi, Phillip Anthony	Deakin, Vic	LP
Bartlett, Kerry Joseph	Macquarie, NSW	LP
Beazley, Hon. Kim Christian	Brand, WA	ALP
Bevis, Hon. Archibald Ronald	Brisbane, Qld	ALP
Billson, Hon. Bruce Fredrick	Dunkley, Vic	LP
Bird, Sharon	Cunningham, NSW	ALP
Bishop, Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen	Mackellar, NSW	LP
Bishop, Hon. Julie Isabel	Curtin, WA	LP
Bowen, Christopher Eyles	Prospect, NSW	ALP
Broadbent, Russell Evan	McMillan, Vic	LP
Brough, Hon. Malcolm Thomas	Longman, Qld	LP
Burke, Anna Elizabeth	Chisholm, Vic	ALP
Burke, Anthony Stephen	Watson, NSW	ALP
Byrne, Anthony Michael	Holt, Vic	ALP
Cadman, Hon. Alan Glyndwr	Mitchell, NSW	LP
Causley, Hon. Ian Raymond	Page, NSW	Nats
Ciobo, Steven Michele	Moncrieff, Qld	LP
Cobb, Hon. John Kenneth	Parkes, NSW	Nats
Corcoran, Ann Kathleen	Isaacs, Vic	ALP
Costello, Hon. Peter Howard	Higgins, Vic	LP
Crean, Hon. Simon Findlay	Hotham, Vic	ALP
Danby, Michael	Melbourne Ports, Vic	ALP
Downer, Hon. Alexander John Gosse	Mayo, SA	LP
Draper, Patricia	Makin, SA	LP
Dutton, Hon. Peter Craig	Dickson, Qld	LP
Edwards, Hon. Graham John	Cowan, WA	ALP
Elliot, Maria Justine	Richmond, NSW	ALP
Ellis, Annette Louise	Canberra, ACT	ALP
Ellis, Katherine Margaret	Adelaide, SA	ALP
Elson, Kay Selma	Forde, Qld	LP
Emerson, Craig Anthony	Rankin, Qld	ALP
Entsch, Hon. Warren George	Leichhardt, NSW	LP
Farmer, Hon. Patrick Francis	Macarthur, NSW	LP
Fawcett, David Julian	Wakefield, SA	LP
Ferguson, Laurence Donald Thomas	Reid, NSW	ALP
Ferguson, Martin John, AM	Batman, Vic	ALP
Ferguson, Michael Darrel	Bass, Tas	LP
Fitzgibbon, Joel Andrew	Hunter, NSW	ALP

### Members of the House of Representatives

Member	Division	Party
Forrest, John Alexander	Mallee, Vic	Nats
Gambaro, Hon. Teresa	Petrie, Qld	LP
Garrett, Peter Robert, AM	Kingsford Smith, NSW	ALP
Gash, Joanna	Gilmore, NSW	LP
Georganas, Steven	Hindmarsh, SA	ALP
George, Jennie	Throsby, NSW	ALP
Georgiou, Petro	Kooyong, Vic	LP
Gibbons, Stephen William	Bendigo, Vic	ALP
Gillard, Julia Eileen	Lalor, Vic	ALP
Grierson, Sharon Joy	Newcastle, NSW	ALP
Griffin, Alan Peter	Bruce, Vic	ALP
Haase, Barry Wayne	Kalgoorlie, WA	LP
Hall, Jill Griffiths	Shortland, NSW	ALP
Hardgrave, Hon. Gary Douglas	Moreton, Qld	LP
Hartsuyker, Luke	Cowper, NSW	Nats
Hatton, Michael John	Blaxland, NSW	ALP
Hawker, Hon. David Peter Maxwell	Wannon, Vic	LP
Hayes, Christopher Patrick	Werriwa, NSW	ALP
Henry, Stuart	Hasluck, WA	LP
Hoare, Kelly Joy	Charlton, NSW	ALP
Hockey, Hon. Joseph Benedict	North Sydney, NSW	LP
Howard, Hon. John Winston	Bennelong, NSW	LP
Hull, Kay Elizabeth	Riverina, NSW	Nats
Hunt, Hon. Gregory Andrew	Flinders, Vic	LP
Irwin, Julia Claire	Fowler, NSW	ALP
Jenkins, Henry Alfred	Scullin, Vic	ALP
Jensen, Dennis Geoffrey	Tangney, WA	LP
Johnson, Michael Andrew	Ryan, Qld	LP
Jull, Hon. David Francis	Fadden, Qld	LP
Katter, Hon. Robert Carl	Kennedy, Qld	Ind
Keenan, Michael Fayat	Stirling, WA	LP
Kelly, Hon. De-Anne Margaret	Dawson, Qld	Nats
Kelly, Hon. Jacqueline Marie	Lindsay, NSW	LP
Kerr, Hon. Duncan James Colquhoun, SC	Denison, Tas	ALP
King, Catherine Fiona	Ballarat, Vic	ALP
Laming, Andrew Charles	Bowman, Qld	LP
Lawrence, Hon. Carmen Mary	Fremantle, WA	ALP
Ley, Hon. Sussan Penelope	Farrer, NSW	LP
Lindsay, Hon. Peter John	Herbert, Qld	LP
Livermore, Kirsten Fiona	Capricornia, Qld	ALP
Lloyd, Hon. James Eric	Robertson, NSW	LP
Macfarlane, Hon. Ian Elgin	Groom, Qld	LP
Macklin, Jennifer Louise	Jagajaga, Vic	ALP
Markus, Louise Elizabeth	Greenway, NSW	LP
May, Margaret Ann	McPherson, Qld	LP
McArthur, Fergus Stewart	Corangamite, Vic	LP
McClelland, Robert Bruce	Barton, NSW	ALP
McGauran, Hon. Peter John	Gippsland, Vic	Nats
McMullan, Robert Francis	Fraser, ACT	ALP

### Members of the House of Representatives

Member	Division	Party
Melham, Daryl	Banks, NSW	ALP
Mirabella, Sophie	Indi, Vic	LP
Moylan, Hon. Judith Eleanor	Pearce, WA	LP
Murphy, John Paul	Lowe, NSW	ALP
Nairn, Hon. Gary Roy	Eden-Monaro, NSW	LP
Nelson, Hon. Brendan John	Bradfield, NSW	LP
Neville, Paul Christopher	Hinkler, Qld	Nats
O'Connor, Brendan Patrick John	Gorton, Vic	ALP
O'Connor, Gavan Michael	Corio, Vic	ALP
Owens, Julie Ann	Parramatta, NSW	ALP
Pearce, Hon. Christopher John	Aston, Vic	LP
Plibersek, Tanya Joan	Sydney, NSW	ALP
Price, Hon. Leo Roger Spurway	Chifley, NSW	ALP
Prosser, Hon. Geoffrey Daniel	Forrest, WA	LP
Pyne, Hon. Christopher Maurice	Sturt, SA	LP
Quick, Harry Vernon	Franklin, Tas	ALP
Randall, Don James	Canning, WA	LP
Richardson, Kym	Kingston, SA	LP
Ripoll, Bernard Fernando	Oxley, Qld	ALP
Robb, Hon. Andrew John, AO	Goldstein, Vic	LP
Roxon, Nicola Louise	Gellibrand, Vic	ALP
Rudd, Kevin Michael	Griffith, Qld	ALP
Ruddock, Hon. Philip Maxwell	Berowra, NSW	LP
Sawford, Rodney Weston	Port Adelaide, SA	ALP
Schultz, Albert John	Hume, NSW	LP
Scott, Hon. Bruce Craig	Maranoa, Qld	Nats
Secker, Patrick Damien	Barker, SA	LP
Sercombe, Robert Charles Grant	Maribyrnong, Vic	ALP
Slipper, Hon. Peter Neil	Fisher, Qld	LP
Smith, Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn	Casey, Vic	LP
Smith, Stephen Francis	Perth, WA	ALP
Snowdon, Hon. Warren Edward	Lingiari, NT	ALP
Somlyay, Hon. Alexander Michael	Fairfax, Qld	LP
Southcott, Andrew John	Boothby, SA	LP
Stone, Hon. Sharman Nancy	Murray, Vic	LP
Swan, Wayne Maxwell	Lilley, Qld	ALP
Tanner, Lindsay James	Melbourne, Vic	ALP
Thompson, Cameron Paul	Blair, Qld	LP
Thomson, Kelvin John	Wills, Vic	ALP
Ticehurst, Kenneth Vincent	Dobell, NSW	LP
Tollner, David William	Solomon, NT	CLP
Truss, Hon. Warren Errol	Wide Bay, Qld	Nats
Tuckey, Hon. Charles Wilson	O'Connor, WA	LP
Turnbull, Hon. Malcolm Bligh	Wentworth, NSW	LP
Vaile, Hon. Mark Anthony James	Lyne, NSW	Nats
Vale, Hon. Danna Sue	Hughes, NSW	LP
Vamvakinou, Maria	Calwell, Vic	ALP
Vasta, Ross Xavier	Bonner, Qld	LP
Wakelin, Barry Hugh	Grey, SA	LP

### **Members of the House of Representatives**

Member	Division	Party
Washer, Malcolm James	Moore, WA	LP
Wilkie, Kim William	Swan, WA	ALP
Windsor, Antony Harold Curties	New England, NSW	Ind
Wood, Jason Peter	La Trobe, Vic	LP

#### **PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

ALP—Australian Labor Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia; Nats—The Nationals;  
Ind—Independent; CLP—Country Liberal Party; AG—Australian Greens

### **Heads of Parliamentary Departments**

Clerk of the Senate—H Evans

Clerk of the House of Representatives—I C Harris

Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—H R Penfold QC



## HOWARD MINISTRY

Prime Minister	The Hon. John Winston Howard MP
Minister for Transport and Regional Services and Deputy Prime Minister	The Hon. Mark Anthony James Vaile MP
Treasurer	The Hon. Peter Howard Costello MP
Minister for Trade	The Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP
Minister for Defence	The Hon. Dr Brendan John Nelson MP
Minister for Foreign Affairs	The Hon. Alexander John Gosse Downer MP
Minister for Health and Ageing and Leader of the House	The Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP
Attorney-General	The Hon. Philip Maxwell Ruddock MP
Minister for Finance and Administration, Leader of the Government in the Senate and Vice-President of the Executive Council	Senator the Hon. Nicholas Hugh Minchin
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Deputy Leader of the House	The Hon. Peter John McGauran MP
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship	The Hon. Kevin James Andrews MP
Minister for Education, Science and Training and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Women's Issues	The Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP
Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Indigenous Affairs	The Hon. Malcolm Thomas Brough MP
Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources	The Hon. Ian Elgin Macfarlane MP
Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations and Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service	The Hon. Joseph Benedict Hockey MP
Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate	Senator the Hon. Helen Lloyd Coonan
Minister for the Environment and Water Resources	The Hon. Malcolm Bligh Turnbull MP
Minister for Human Services	Senator the Hon. Ian Gordon Campbell

**(The above ministers constitute the cabinet)**

## **HOWARD MINISTRY—*continued***

Minister for Justice and Customs and Manager of Government Business in the Senate	Senator the Hon. Christopher Martin Ellison
Minister for Fisheries, Forestry and Conservation	Senator the Hon. Eric Abetz
Minister for the Arts and Sport	Senator the Hon. George Henry Brandis SC
Minister for Community Services	Senator the Hon. Nigel Gregory Scullion
Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer	The Hon. Peter Craig Dutton MP
Special Minister of State	The Hon. Gary Roy Nairn MP
Minister for Vocational and Further Education	The Hon. Andrew John Robb MP
Minister for Ageing	Senator the Hon. Santo Santoro
Minister for Small Business and Tourism	The Hon. Frances Esther Bailey MP
Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads	The Hon. James Eric Lloyd MP
Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence	The Hon. Bruce Frederick Billson MP
Minister for Workforce Participation	The Hon. Dr Sharman Nancy Stone MP
Assistant Minister for Health and Ageing	The Hon. Christopher Maurice Pyne MP
Assistant Minister for the Environment and Water Resources	The Hon. John Kenneth Cobb MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Finance and Administration	Senator the Hon. Richard Mansell Colbeck
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources	The Hon. Robert Charles Baldwin MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Defence	The Hon. Peter John Lindsay MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services	The Hon. De-Anne Margaret Kelly MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship	The Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister	The Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn Smith MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer	The Hon. Christopher John Pearce MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	The Hon. Sussan Penelope Ley MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Education, Science and Training	The Hon. Patrick Francis Farmer MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs	The Hon. Gregory Andrew Hunt MP

## SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition	Kevin Michael Rudd MP
Deputy Leader of the Opposition, Shadow Minister for Employment and Industrial Relations and Shadow Minister for Social Inclusion	Julia Eileen Gillard MP
Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for National Development, Resources and Energy	Senator Christopher Vaughan Evans
Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Communications and Information Technology	Senator Stephen Michael Conroy
Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Water and Manager of Opposition Business in the House	Anthony Norman Albanese MP
Shadow Minister for Homeland Security and Shadow Minister for Territories	The Hon. Archibald Ronald Bevis MP
Shadow Assistant Treasurer and Shadow Minister for Revenue and Competition Policy	Christopher Eyles Bowen MP
Shadow Minister for Immigration, Integration and Citizenship	Anthony Stephen Burke MP
Shadow Minister for Industry and Shadow Minister for Innovation, Science and Research	Senator Kim John Carr
Shadow Minister for Trade and Regional Development	The Hon. Simon Findlay Crean MP
Shadow Minister for Service Economy, Small Business and Independent Contractors	Craig Anthony Emerson MP
Shadow Minister for Multicultural Affairs, Urban Development and Consumer Affairs	Laurence Donald Thomas Ferguson MP
Shadow Minister for Transport, Roads and Tourism	Martin John Ferguson MP
Shadow Minister for Defence	Joel Andrew Fitzgibbon MP
Shadow Minister for Climate Change, Environment and Heritage and Shadow Minister for the Arts	Peter Robert Garrett MP
Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Shadow Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Shadow Special Minister of State	Alan Peter Griffin MP
Shadow Minister for Justice and Customs and Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate	Senator Joseph William Ludwig
Shadow Minister for Sport, Recreation and Health Promotion and Shadow Minister for Local Government	Senator Kate Alexandra Lundy
Shadow Minister for Families and Community Services and Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Reconciliation	Jennifer Louise Macklin MP
Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs	Robert Bruce McClelland MP
Shadow Minister for Ageing, Disabilities and Carers	Senator Jan Elizabeth McLucas

Shadow Minister for Federal/State Relations and Shadow Minister for International Development Assistance	Robert Francis McMullan MP
Shadow Minister for Primary Industries, Fisheries and Forestry	Senator Kerry Williams Kelso O'Brien
Shadow Minister for Human Services, Housing, Youth and Women	Tanya Joan Plibersek MP
Shadow Minister for Health	Nicola Louise Roxon MP
Shadow Minister for Superannuation and Inter- generational Finance and Shadow Minister for Banking and Financial Services	Senator the Hon. Nicholas John Sherry
Shadow Minister for Education and Training	Stephen Francis Smith MP
Shadow Treasurer	Wayne Maxwell Swan MP
Shadow Minister for Finance	Lindsay James Tanner MP
Shadow Attorney-General and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House	Kelvin John Thomson MP
Shadow Minister for Public Administration and Accountability, Shadow Minister for Corporate Governance and Responsibility and Shadow Minister for Workforce Participation	Senator Penelope Ying Yen Wong
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Foreign Af- fairs	Anthony Michael Byrne MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence and Veterans' Affairs	The Hon. Graham John Edwards MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Environment and Heritage	Jennie George MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Treasury	Catherine Fiona King MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Education	Kirsten Fiona Livermore MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition	John Paul Murphy MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Industrial Relations	Brendan Patrick John O'Connor MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Industry and Innovation	Bernard Fernando Ripoll MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern Australia and Indigenous Affairs	The Hon. Warren Edward Snowdon MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Leader of the Opposition (Social and Community Affairs)	Senator Ursula Mary Stephens

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*Monday, 12 February 2007*

The **SPEAKER (Hon. David Hawker)** took the chair at 12.30 pm and read prayers.

### COMMITTEES

#### Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee Report

**Miss JACKIE KELLY (Lindsay)** (12.31 pm)—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, I present the committee's report entitled *Community television: options for digital broadcasting*, together with the minutes of proceedings and evidence received by the committee.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

**Miss JACKIE KELLY**—On behalf of the Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, I am pleased to present this report on the options for digital broadcasting for community television in Australia. This is the first report for the inquiry into community broadcasting.

The last decade has seen tremendous growth in the community television sector. If this growth is repeated in the next decade then enormous diversity will be added to Australia's media. There is no doubt that the community television sector is extremely valuable in our media landscape. The sector is the incubator of diverse and innovative programming and is essentially the training ground for the commercial and national broadcasters.

The sector faces a significant hurdle, and that is access to digital broadcasting. Community television currently only broadcasts in analog and so cannot be seen by those 20 per cent of Australians who have purchased digital television receivers. The logical conclusion of this scenario is that by the time 90 per cent of Australians have bought digital receivers and are watching only through digital spectrum, and analog is switched off, no-one will be watching community television. Without the opportunity to simulcast, the sector will have to start its growth again sometime after 2012.

This report has examined the options for ensuring the transition to digital for community television in Australia, including the opportunity to simulcast, and takes into account the financial burden of conversion and simulcast for community television broadcasters. I would like to thank the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts and her office for their close communication with our committee. They have signalled their intention to sell the remaining spectrum soon and indicated that it would be very helpful for this report to be brought forward at this time

rather than later in the year, as the committee was intending to do, with the report on the rest of the inquiry.

The report makes five recommendations to government which encapsulate the only way community television will survive the transition to digital without having to grow from scratch after the analog switch-off. The committee recommends that the Australian government sell the unreserved channel known as licence A, with an obligation to be placed on the new licensee to carry community television during the simulcast period. Carriage during the simulcast period would be at no cost to the community television broadcast sector.

The committee understands the urgent need for a simulcast arrangement and that any significant delays will lead to loss of audience and revenue for the community sector. To avoid further loss of audience the committee recommends that the terms of sale for licence A include the condition to simulcast community television by 1 January 2008, otherwise penalties on the new licensee will apply. Should licence A not sell before the end of 2007, the committee recommends that licence A be loaned to a national broadcaster for carriage of community television during the simulcast period. As part of this arrangement the committee recommends that sufficient funding should be allocated to that national broadcaster to cover the costs of digital community television transmission during the simulcast period. To ensure that community television has a secure long-term future, the committee recommends that the Australian government, at analog switch-off, convert the spectrum band known as Channel 31 to digital and permanently allocate that channel to current and future community broadcasters.

The report makes some important funding recommendations. The community television sector will have difficulty in financing the conversion to digital and also face financial hardship having to pay for additional broadcasts during the simulcast period. The committee believes that the estimated costs for conversion of community television to digital are comparatively small compared to the substantial financial support given to the national broadcasters and regional commercial networks and the support given to the metropolitan commercial broadcasters through the loan of spectrum in the simulcast period. The committee therefore recommends that the Australian government provide funding of \$6 million to the community television sector for the conversion of broadcast equipment to digital and recommends the provision of \$1.7 million per year to the sector for each year of simulcast.

The recommendations outlined in the report are designed to ensure that community television is able to participate in Australia's digital media landscape. I thank the members of the committee for their dedication to the inquiry. The members of the committee showed unified support for the report. I also thank the

committee secretariat for their counsel, assistance and patience throughout the inquiry process.

In conclusion, I would like to thank the many individuals and organisations who provided evidence to this inquiry through submissions or by appearing before the committee. This report addresses only one aspect of the committee's broader inquiry into community broadcasting. A detailed report covering the full range of issues for the entire sector will be released later this year. I commend this report to the House.

**Ms OWENS** (Parramatta) (12.36 pm)—The Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts believes that the plight of community television in gaining access to digital spectrum is now dire; hence the bringing forward of this section of the report into options for digital broadcasting for community television ahead of the full report into community broadcasting, which will be delivered later this year.

The size and importance of the community television sector is currently greater than most people realise. There are currently four full-time community television licences—Sydney, Brisbane, Perth and Melbourne—with trial services in Adelaide, Lismore and Mount Gambier. Arguably the most successful is Channel 31 in Melbourne, which has 40 affiliated member groups representing a variety of communities, and has 1.3 million viewers tuning in every month. Community television also provides extensive training opportunities for people wishing to enter the television field. That factor is well recognised within the commercial television industry.

The single biggest issue facing the vibrant community media is the switch to digital. Community television does not have sufficient spectrum to simulcast. It is analog only. As people switch to digital in their homes, they effectively lose easy access to the community television channel. If they know their way around the equipment they can do a special set-up that will allow them to switch back and forwards between digital and analog, but we all know that that does not happen and the reality is that for the community television sector the gradual switch to digital is eroding its market. The idea that community television could have an instant switch from analog to digital on the switch-off date is clearly absurd, as it would mean that community television effectively goes down towards zero at switch-off and then must start again to build its market. The committee supports the community television sector's view that, without the ability to simulcast in both analog and digital during this transition period, community television is unlikely to survive the switch-off.

I am pleased to say that there was unanimous committee support for the recommendations that, if adopted by government, will provide a pathway for

community television to take its rightful place in the new digital landscape. We on this side of the House urge the government to adopt the recommendations and act quickly, and I am pleased to hear the chair, the member for Lindsay, say that the minister has indicated a willingness to support these recommendations. I would like to say—although I will not dwell on it too much at this time—that the government's history of making commitments to community radio has far outstripped its record in acting on those commitments.

The knowledge that community television would have to switch from analog to digital has been around for at least as long as the Howard government itself. The Australian government announced a commitment to community television in 1998, guaranteeing the community television sector that it would have the access to the spectrum needed to broadcast one standard definition channel in digital. The minister assured community television that it would have access to digital spectrum by 2001. Then, in 2001, the minister announced the cancellation of the datacasting spectrum due to inadequate competition, and effectively left the future of digital community television in limbo. In that year the government made an election commitment, just as it had in 1998, that it would provide access to spectrum for digital transmission.

Then in 2002 the Department of Communications, Information Technology and the Arts conducted a review of the regulatory arrangements for community television and how access to spectrum could be provided free of charge. It recommended that consideration should be given to providing an environment in which the sector would have greater regulatory certainty. The Community Broadcasting Association kept making submissions and time passed. Then, in 2004, another election year, the government, which still had not delivered on the 1998 commitment or the 2001 commitment, made the same election commitment again—that the coalition remained committed to the inclusion of community broadcasting in the digital environment.

Then there was the digital television review of 2004–05, a discussion paper in 2005 and then *Ready, get set, go digital—a digital action plan for Australia* in November 2006, which suggested that the sector explore options for simulcast arrangements on its own. Now it is 2007 and community television has just one shot left. The recommendations made by this committee are the only options that remain for community television. If they are not given through a 'must carry provision' on licence A there is really no future for community television beyond the switch-off date.

I thank my colleagues on the other side of the House for clearly providing such incredible support for the future of community television. The recommendations

that we have made go further than the government has in the past. (*Time expired*)

**The SPEAKER**—The time allotted for statements on this report has expired. Does the member for Lindsay wish to move a motion in connection with the report to enable it to be debated on a later occasion?

**Miss JACKIE KELLY** (Lindsay) (12.41 pm)—I move:

That the House take note of the report.

**The SPEAKER**—In accordance with standing order 39 the debate is adjourned. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for a later hour this day.

### MAIN COMMITTEE

#### Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee

##### Reference

**Miss JACKIE KELLY** (Lindsay) (12.42 pm)—I move:

That the order of the day be referred to the Main Committee for debate.

Question agreed to.

#### AIRPORT DEVELOPMENT AND AVIATION NOISE OMBUDSMAN BILL 2007

##### First Reading

Bill and explanatory memorandum presented by **Mr Georganas**.

**Mr GEORGANAS** (Hindmarsh) (12.42 pm)—I rise to reintroduce a bill that many members of Adelaide's western suburbs community asked me to introduce and advance, the Airport Development and Aviation Noise Ombudsman Bill 2006. The residents I am representing here today are those who have for year after year had their lives interrupted by low-flying aircraft. They have had their children wake up at night, their sleep patterns broken and their nerves tested by the sporadic, piercing screams of jet engines descending upon Adelaide Airport.

There are also those who have had, and continue to have, walls that would rival those of any great ancient city erected adjacent to the boundary of airport land, accommodating warehouses and retail stores that cast more than just a shadow over anyone in their vicinity. Residents who live adjacent to Adelaide Airport or under its flight path have repeatedly made claims of excessive noise, curfew breaches and development that is at odds with the Adelaide Airport master plan.

This has not been a new or recent phenomenon. Complaints have been coming out of the homes, the streets and the suburbs around Adelaide Airport for year after year. I live in Mile End, which is adjacent to the area that has suffered the worst excesses of the noise pollution from aircraft flying overhead. I know how my neighbours feel—those in my street and my

suburb and those adjacent in other suburbs, especially places like Brooklyn Park, Richmond, Netley, Lockleys, Cowandilla, Glenelg North and West Beach, just to name a few. They are sick of the impact of airport related noise and they want to have their voices heard. More than that, they want someone at arm's length from organisations involved—the air-carriers, the airport and the government—to hear their experiences and learn of the effect that airport related activities have on their lives.

They want to be able to show someone other than those with a vested interest how poorly the master plan system is working from a resident's perspective and how the draft plan has been painstakingly written with substantial and meaningful consultation only to be amended after the fact to facilitate development outcomes opposed to the approved master plan. They want to be able to direct their concerns through an independent, non-party political, non-partisan medium to the government of the day to avoid the politics and the inflammation and point-scoring. They need someone removed from, and not subordinate to, the minister and his department to take their experiences, concerns and even allegations on board, to test them and, as appropriate, to communicate the issues to the powers that be, hopefully in a constructive manner.

This is what the residents want. All they want is a little fairness and someone independent to listen to them and their concerns. That is not asking for much. They can access an ombudsman to hear their concerns regarding the Defence Force, immigration or taxation—even the postal industry. There are complaint bodies to receive representations regarding banking, financial services, telecommunications, energy and insurance. But when it comes to the federal government's privatised airports and the impact they have on the community, it seems that this government simply does not care.

This government does not care that residents see themselves being totally alienated by the federal government's Airports Act. The government care so little about residents' concerns that they are amplifying and intensifying the negative measures allowable through the Airports Act with the current Airports Amendment Bill. Other members of this House with privatised airports in or adjacent to their electorates, such as the member for Hasluck, will, I am sure, testify to the experiences as represented in written and oral submissions to the current Senate inquiry into the Airports Amendment Bill. These stem not only from the frustrations of residents—those we represent here in this place—but also from organisations disadvantaged by the system as it currently operates.

We have had what could be described as a civil war going on within this country between airport lessee companies and local city councils over the appropriate

application and payment of council rates. We have also seen the total disregard shown to the state and local government infrastructure that is necessary to actually facilitate customers visiting the businesses springing up on airport land and the limitations of state and local laws and by-laws regarding planning and the maintenance of the areas around leased airports. Surely we want a mechanism by which conflict is minimised and an office that can help settle problems, not inflame them—a vehicle that is not in any business's or government's back pocket for the consideration of issues that drive a wedge into and damage our society. I urge all parliamentarians who are interested in the wellbeing of communities around the country and who have regard for the objective and logical progression of concerns and problems towards better solutions to support this bill.

Bill read a first time.

Ordered that the second reading be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

### PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

#### Homeless and the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program

**Ms GEORGE** (Throsby) (12.47 pm)—I move:

That the House:

- (1) notes that:
  - (a) on nearly any night there are around 100,000 Australians who are homeless and that nearly half of these people are under 25, with young people aged 12-18 making up a quarter of all those who are homeless; and
  - (b) the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program (SAAP) is often the last resort for people who find themselves without, or at risk of being without, safe, secure or adequate housing;
- (2) expresses concern at the recent findings of the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (AIHW), which show that:
  - (a) SAAP is able to accommodate 12,335 people on an average day;
  - (b) SAAP is unable to accommodate all who request immediate accommodation, with an estimated 304 people (193 adults and unaccompanied children and 111 accompanying children) turned away on an average day;
  - (c) over half (56 per cent) of the people making valid requests for immediate accommodation on any given day were turned away;
  - (d) family groups had more difficulty in obtaining SAAP than individuals; and
  - (e) a large proportion of the homeless population do not receive SAAP accommodation; and
- (3) urges the Government to:
  - (a) recognise the immense pressure under which SAAP funded services are operating, with reduced real funding levels under the current agreement;

- (b) provide additional funding to meet unmet demand; and
- (c) develop strategies and work co-operatively with other levels of government to reduce homelessness.

On any night there are almost 100,000 men, women and children who are homeless. Homelessness affects people of all ages with nearly half of those who are in this category being under 25. Not only are people who experience homelessness a diverse group in terms of age, gender and circumstances but the profile of homeless people has broadened from predominately older, lone men to now include more women, young people and families. Homeless people are among the most marginalised people in Australia.

The studies on homelessness in Australia show that there are different levels of homelessness ranging from people who live on the streets to people who are in temporary shelter or crisis accommodation through to residents of boarding houses who have no security of tenure. The factors that contribute to homelessness are diverse, complex and often interdependent. Personal factors such as family breakdown, domestic violence and mental health problems contribute to the underlying structural causes, which include poverty, unemployment and an inadequate stock of affordable housing.

The Supported Accommodation Assistance Program provides funding to around 1,200 agencies throughout Australia that work tirelessly to provide support for homeless people. A recent Australian Institute of Health and Welfare study showed some of the limitations in the current levels of support that are able to be provided through this program due to inadequate levels of funding. Despite the best efforts of the service providers, a large proportion of our homeless population are not able to be accommodated through SAAP. Though around 12,335 people are catered for on an average day, at the same time an estimated 304 people are turned away—people seeking crisis accommodation. Additional funding by all levels of government is desperately needed to meet this unmet demand. I speak on behalf of local providers such as the Southern Youth and Family Services, which provides a comprehensive range of programs for homeless youth, and the Warilla Women's Refuge. Both organisations are often in the position of having to turn people away due to inadequate resources and funding.

A few years ago in the publication *Counting the homeless 2001*, statistics were published on both a national and a state basis, based on the outcomes of the 2001 census. It was estimated back in 2001 that there were 26,676 homeless people in NSW, and in my own region an estimated 1,530 people faced homelessness every night. Most of the homelessness in the Illawarra region is in fact hidden, with nearly 46 per cent of the recorded homeless population living temporarily with

friends and relatives and 22 per cent of the recorded homeless in assisted accommodation. The extrapolation of the figures showed that 19 per cent of these people were in private boarding homes, but in the Illawarra 13 per cent of our homeless population were indeed living in improvised dwellings and on the streets. It makes you wonder in an economy that is burgeoning and a country as rich as ours how we continue with this national problem.

We need to develop a more effective national strategy in a coordinated and integrated manner, bringing in all levels of government to address the range of factors that contribute to homelessness. Very importantly, access to regular, stable employment and an increase in the stock of affordable housing would have a major impact on reducing the high levels of homelessness in our communities. I want to take the opportunity to commend the efforts of those who work in SAAP funded services and recognise the pressures on them which require additional levels of support and funding to help address a serious national and regional problem.

**The SPEAKER**—Is the motion seconded?

**Mr Adams**—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

**Mr CIOBO** (Moncrieff) (12.53 pm)—I am pleased to rise to support parts of the motion that have been put forward by the member for Throsby, in particular to acknowledge the true problems that our nation faces with respect to homelessness and the need to deal with homelessness. There are some aspects of this motion, though, that I believe may be more party political than bipartisan. Having said that, in the short time I have available I would like to put on the record some of my observations about the importance of the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program as well as observations from actually working in street outreach.

A number of years ago, before I came into this place, I had the opportunity to work with Rosies Street Outreach in Brisbane and to deal directly, on Friday and Saturday nights, with some of the most destitute people in Australian society. My wife and I would spend several hours on Friday nights in the Brisbane mall handing out cups of coffee and biscuits and basically just enjoying friendship with those who were living on the streets at the time. Having spent about a year doing that, the overarching observations that I would make from my experience are that there are a large number of people whom homelessness is thrust upon. There are also, though, a number who choose to be homeless, and that choice is perhaps motivated in many respects by a form of psychiatric disability. In fact, that may be the cause of all of it; I am not certain. It is also clear that there are a number of services available that reach out to people who are destitute and homeless which are not utilised. But there can also be

no doubt that there are insufficient services to meet the demand were all these people to reach out for assistance at the same time.

Having said all of that, I do believe that the Howard government, in collaboration with state governments around the country, have made a very definite impact on addressing homelessness in the Australian community. A real solution to this problem is multifaceted. It is simply not the case that, if we were to pour more money into the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, that would reconcile the problem. It certainly would not. In addition to that, there needs to be funding that goes into psychiatric care to ensure that, where possible, we prevent people moving into the streets in the first place. It requires a holistic approach and it certainly is my belief that through, for example, the SAAP as well as Commonwealth-state housing agreements and other like programs we will take very measurable steps to minimise the risk of Australians becoming homeless and improve the lot of those who do become homeless so that they can move back off the streets.

This problem is particularly pronounced on the Gold Coast. On the Gold Coast we have a very sorry situation, and I have been exceptionally critical of the state government's nonperformance in this area in the past. The fact is that in a city of some 550,000 people we have an appalling situation where, over the last 17 years, we have seen very little investment by the state government. The consequence is that on the Gold Coast today there are approximately 15 beds available for a population of 550,000 for crisis and emergency accommodation. It is simply not enough.

I have taken the time to look at exactly what the Commonwealth is doing. Under the SAAP, the Commonwealth is providing a total of \$145 million over five years in the joint Commonwealth and Queensland government SAAP. This year, 2006-07, we are providing \$39.3 million and we hope that by the end of this, the fifth iteration of the SAAP, the Queensland government will match the Commonwealth's contribution dollar for dollar, because at this point they do not. That is part of the reason why in Queensland we see that some services are not at an appropriate level. Under the Commonwealth-state housing agreement, the Commonwealth is providing some \$940 million, with the Queensland government contributing some \$344 million for the same period—again, a significant contribution from the Commonwealth.

From my perspective, we certainly should measure the money that is going towards the program, but we also need to look at other steps being taken, as I said, such as Medicare rebates for psychiatric counselling, and make sure that we are servicing these people who are often among the most destitute of all Australians.

**Mr ADAMS** (Lyons) (12.58 pm)—I commend the member for Throsby, Jennie George, for bringing this motion before the House. I concur with the last speaker, the member for Moncrieff, that some of the mental health issues that he spoke of lead to homelessness and certainly need to be addressed. Of course, he just went down the same track that this government always does of blaming the state governments. It is a constant rise from that side of the House: always blame the state governments.

Homelessness may not appear to affect the largest percentage of the population, but hidden homelessness could double the figures that the member for Throsby stated. Those she did mention represent some of the neediest in our community. Homelessness is not having a roof over your head, but it means much more than that. Anglicare's submission to the inquiry, which called for more funds, defines homelessness as:

- the lack of access to an adequate material standard of living (in terms of food, shelter, clothing and health) resulting primarily, but not only, from inadequate income; and
- the lack of opportunity to participate fully in society (for example through employment, education, recreation and social relationships).

The submission further cited:

"Adequacy" is defined in relation to community standards and may change over time, as do standards of living for the community as a whole.

Without somewhere to sleep and put one's belongings, there is little hope of seeking employment, receiving training or even having an address to have one's Centrelink payments sent to. It means you cannot use a bank; it means getting to a doctor is harder as many doctors have full books and do not take casuals. Without funds, clean clothes are difficult to find and, of course, the list goes on. A homeless person has little option but to live on cash handouts, use soup kitchens or eat takeaway foods and they have little chance to clean themselves and their clothes. Partial homelessness has the same difficulties. In fact, a report today about interest rates and the cost of housing in Australia shows that many families are defaulting on their mortgage payments and may well be on the homeless list too very soon.

The SAAP funded services have a role to play in helping people onto the first step back into society. Supported accommodation assistance means just that—helping people to put together the necessary tools to be able to find shelter. I believe that the whole way we approach housing has been inadequate, especially since the federal government has abandoned public housing. The rental sector has become so small and so expensive that even people who are quite well off cannot find suitable rental accommodation and some of what is

available can be highly unsuitable for the individuals being housed.

Even as an old age pensioner, there are problems. If you have a house that is too big but are living on an age pension, you are caught in a bind. If you sell it and go into an aged persons' home, the home takes a large percentage of the house's value as an entry fee, and then your pension barely covers the 'rent'. The super you have been saving to pass onto your children has suddenly disappeared. You can give a little away but no more than \$30,000 in total, so it becomes a headache to try and work out what to do at the end of your life. There is no real option to allow another pensioner without housing to share with you because then they put up the charges. Both the owner and the tenant are penalised.

So, whether you are young, a single mother, homeless through illness, from a divided family at any age or elderly, housing becomes a fundamental survival problem. SAAP therefore provides a vitally important link between all those thousands of people who need help with housing at a particularly difficult time of their lives and all levels of government. Will the federal government pick up this role if they abandon SAAP? It is unlikely, and in these current times when the national government is moving away from social intervention, it looks like we are another step closer to being the 51st state of the USA. (*Time expired*)

**Mr HARDGRAVE** (Moreton) (1.03 pm)—I thank the member for Throsby for introducing this motion in this place today because homelessness—as is the case with this sort of discussion—highlights the differences between what an Australian Labor Party government would be like and what the coalition government is like. The Labor Party love victims. They love making the point that victimhood is coming your way, that you have no means or ability to actually repair your circumstances and that the Bible was wrong when it said, 'God will help those who help themselves.' Essentially, they are saying: 'Don't try, don't make any effort, don't do anything, you are doomed to fail. Labor will give you some means by which to support yourself because you are a failure and you should never even try.' That is the essence of the philosophical underpinning of all of the contributions from those opposite so far in this discussion.

On this side we very much believe that the strength of our society, our economy and our ambition on an individual level and, indeed, on the collective level has the capacity to look after those who do not have the ability to make a difference and fulfil their basic needs. As the member for Lyons said, without a place to live it is impossible to train, to learn and to take on all of the basic aspects of day-to-day life in the modern era. There is no doubt about that. But a question still begs to be asked when you see headlines in the papers in,

say, the Illawarra, where the member for Throsby comes from, or perhaps in the north-western suburbs of Melbourne, where I have seen kids say they cannot get a job. They say they have all these problems and that they are not going to leave a local community to go and get a job somewhere else, and yet you go into parts of Australia where the economy is so robust and where they are crying out for young people who will show up to work on time. Guess what? Accommodation is taken care of in places like the Western Australian and Queensland mining industries.

So, before we spiral out of control in the despair of some dreadful sense of victimhood that the Labor Party would like to perpetuate—the sense that you are never going to achieve anything, so do not even try; that kind of logic in running Australia repulses me—let us understand that there is a lot of assistance possible for young people in this country to move from one part of Australia to another. They can gain government assistance to help them meet the costs of living away from home. These are allowances that never existed under a previous Labor administration because they had this view that you did not have to try; you are always going to fail, so let us support you. You are a victim, because Labor loves people feeling bad about themselves. People who feel bad about themselves vote for social welfare programs and they back governments that want them to feel bad. So I really welcome this discussion.

Mr Deputy Speaker, let me tell you about those who cannot in fact help themselves. They are the ones we have to deal with. I have spoken to young ladies who have gone to places such as the Southside Education Centre. It is a school which receives more government assistance and subsidies than any other in Australia and is based right in the middle of my electorate. It was auspiced by the Baptist Church about 15 or more years ago and is run by Colleen Mitrow, who should receive an Order of Australia, AC, not because she is like some of those who seem to get it because of the jobs they have but because she is somebody who has done a great job. She is somebody who has taken girls who have basically been living in shopping trolleys—that way when it is cold in Brisbane they can sleep off the ground. She has taken in girls who have been expelled, sent away, from the state education system and she has said, ‘We’re going to give you a place to stay, a place to learn and a place to grow.’

She has worked with the Department of Family and Community Services, under this government, and secured the JET creche that is operating out of the Churches of Christ hall on Station Road at Sunnybank. She actually makes it possible for young people who have children to still have an opportunity to participate in the learning process. They are the sorts of practical measures that make each individual circumstance important and that back those individuals.

Likewise, the Australian Red Cross have an ambition for a Brisbane centre for young people. They tell me that, according to the 2001 census, 109 young people were sleeping rough in the inner city, and I hope the numbers are lower now. The Australian Red Cross want to not just give them a place to stay; they want to give them a place to grow and to learn so that they as individuals can get on their own two feet, pay taxes and be a part of this society in every possible way. As I said, in paraphrasing the Bible: God will help those who help themselves. I will back all of those every day, and for those who do not have that capacity I will give them my support too. (*Time expired*)

**Mr MARTIN FERGUSON** (Batman) (1.08 pm)—The House owes the member for Throsby a debt of gratitude for bringing this issue to the attention of the parliament. It focuses on issues that the Howard government, as reflected by the member for Moreton’s comments, does not want to face up to. The real issue is that the faces of homelessness have changed over the last two decades from the old, derelict man on the park bench, clutching a bottle of wine or spirits wrapped in a brown paper bag, to a man who is now joined by too many of his fellow Australians.

The homeless of today now includes younger men, unemployed and hopeless, the confused and mentally ill and, increasingly, women with children, desperate to escape violent and destructive domestic situations, who now make up over 42 per cent of homeless people. But perhaps worst of all are the young people cast off by their families—people who cannot cope or do not care. Young people under the age of 25, who are part of our future generation, now make up nearly half of the around 100,000 Australians who sleep rough on the streets every night. Youth aged between 12 and 18 years of age make up a quarter of all those who are homeless and the situation, unfortunately, is getting worse.

Community service organisations and major charities are doing their best, but they all agree that current resources cannot meet the demand for services. On an average day, the Supported Accommodation Assistance Program turns away more people than they have the capacity to help—up to 304,000—and it is a similar story across the country with all service providers. It is a sad indictment on all of us. Our society has to confront this challenge. The situation is all the more depressing given that this is not a new problem. Both major political parties can improve their performances on this issue. Homelessness in Australia has been a silent smear on our national community for decades. In more recent times, the Howard government for too long has directed much needed funding to chasing votes rather than to funding providers that could help in a practical way those most vulnerable and most in need.

You may be able to avert your eyes while walking along when you come across a homeless person sheltering in a doorway, but the unavoidable reality is that too many people live in poverty and on our streets. The resources and property booms of recent times have provided well for many of us, but not all of us. These people are asking not for a hand-out but for a helping hand to enable them to work on breaking the vicious cycle of poverty, which can destroy opportunity—but, worst of all, hope—for many in Australian communities.

Let us be clear: these people do not want to live on our streets. They do not want to live exposed to the weather, waking every morning thankful just to be alive and on a constant search for the next meal, many of which are provided by non-charitable organisations. These people want what we want: they want to be a respected part of our community, they want to earn their own living, they want to contribute to society and they want to give something back for the helping hand.

For some, this dream will always remain just that: an unattained reality. It would be a poor statement on our society if we were to let it continue for people such as Andrew, a homeless person from the age of 14, one of the 100,000 people who each night have nowhere to call home. Andrew ran away from foster care as a young teenager and spent a despondent youth constantly getting into trouble with the law. He died at the age of 24, murdered whilst living on the streets. He had fathered three children; two were taken as infants into foster care, like Andrew. What a hopeless start in life for those young children. As of today their future is unknown.

That is why I join with my colleagues on both sides of the House to clearly state that we can do better. I urge the government to provide additional funding to meet the unmet demand of the homeless and to develop strategies and cooperation with non-charitable organisations and local and state governments to work to reduce homelessness. Let us share the benefits of the boom that most of us are benefiting from and offer a helping hand to the homeless, many of whom are young. It is no longer just the man with the wine bottle but also the young women who are running away from desperate domestic situations. We need to confront the challenge. Here is a challenge to all of us in the lead-up to the next election. There might not be a lot of votes in it, but it gives people hope for the future. (*Time expired*)

**Mr HARTSUYKER** (Cowper) (1.13 pm)—I welcome this opportunity to speak on the motion by the member for Throsby and, while I share her concerns for those who are homeless, I believe that her call for an increase in federal funding ignores many important issues in this debate. We all recognise that homelessness has a range of causes. No-one becomes homeless

because they want to. Marital breakdown, employment difficulties, mental health problems, debt, gambling and addiction can all be causes and, very often, a combination of these factors lead to people becoming homeless.

I suspect that this may be one of those areas, like the health service, where we cannot control the demand for services and demand will always outstrip the resources. Like the health service, it is one of those areas where the federal government provides funding but where the state provides the front-line services. That is, after all, very much the role of our states and territories—delivering front-line services. Again, like the health service, it is one of those areas where prevention is better than cure. I shall return to that theme shortly, but first let us remind ourselves how services for the homeless are currently funded.

Under the previous Supported Accommodation Assistance Program, or SAAP, the federal government provided \$833 million, an increase of 18 per cent, or \$115 million, on the previous period. Under the current SAAP agreement, which runs for five years and is currently in its second year, the federal government will provide \$932 million, an increase of \$100 million. I am pleased to say that, within the current agreement, the states and territories will move towards making an equal contribution. I understand that the New South Wales government is in fact already making a matching contribution, and I commend it for that. But if funding is a major problem, as the member for Throsby suggests, then perhaps she will consider an approach to her colleagues in the states and territories to ask them to increase their funding too.

I mentioned earlier some of the causes of homelessness. The federal government has increased the funds available to SAAP and it is attacking the causes directly, with specific projects, and indirectly as well. One example is employment. Since March last year we have seen some 245,000 jobs created in the Australian economy. Unemployment is at a record low. We are actively involved through our skills initiatives to ensure that people of all ages can take advantage of the opportunities now available.

Mental health is an important area. I know from discussions in the backbench committee on health and ageing that the results of the trend towards removing those with mental health problems from institutions and placing them in the community have not always been encouraging and this impacts directly on the numbers of homeless. It is generally agreed that the support that should be available to make this policy a success is delivered by the states and territories, and this has been very much lacking. I acknowledge the efforts made under the mental health strategy to address this problem but, again, what is happening to the funding?



I understand that New South Wales is currently delivering only 60 per cent of its matched funding. Queensland is delivering about half, and three other states and territories are apparently not delivering anything at all. What sort of contribution to tackling one of the very important problems in our community is this? If the performance by the states and territories on matching the federal contribution on homelessness is as poor as their performance on mental health then we are clearly not going to make much progress.

Gambling is another cause of homelessness. I suggest that the states and territories consider putting a levy on their income from gambling and direct it to alleviating the problem of homelessness. I think it is vitally important that the states consider this point; it is a very important one. Rivers of gold are being provided through the proceeds of gambling, which has been attributed as a cause of homelessness, yet there is no direct link with funding. I think that would be a useful initiative that could assist our homeless.

We should always be devoting more funds to tackling problems in our community. Through its increase to SAAP, the federal government is doing that. The states have some considerable way to go. I would like to see them matching that federal government contribution. I would like to see them stepping up to the plate with more effective program delivery so that our terrible problem of homelessness is more adequately addressed and so that the plight of the homeless is relieved.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)**—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

### **Australian Aid Program**

**Mrs HULL** (Riverina) (1.18 pm)—I move:

That the House:

- (1) supports the Australian aid program's focus on eradication of poverty and corruption in developing countries;
- (2) supports the Australian aid program's efforts to overcome the impact of poverty and corruption and to strengthen democratic institutions by promotion of good governance with specific reference to women and children in developing countries;
- (3) calls on the Parliament to encourage the Australian aid program to promote the human rights of, and the elimination of discrimination against, women and children in developing countries, in activities that:
  - (a) support the elimination of gender-based discrimination—such as land, inheritance and property rights, family law, gender-based violence and discrimination in employment; and
  - (b) support equitable access (including legal representation) for women and children to the legal system.

Corruption is a major brake on our efforts to reform poverty reduction in many countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Corruption undermines aid effectiveness and particularly impacts on the most disadvantaged, including women. At the Millennium Summit in 2005, the Prime Minister committed to increasing the Australian aid program to around \$4 billion per annum by 2010. Increases in aid will be conditional on strengthened governance and reduced corruption in our partner countries, and I wholeheartedly support this approach. I am very pleased to have the member for Pearce second my motion today for she has a great commitment to and understanding of women's issues, and her leadership of the Australian delegation to the Inter-Parliamentary Union, the IPU, is powerful and determined, particularly in support of developing countries and gender equality.

Gender inequalities intensify poverty and perpetuate it from one generation to the next, preventing women and girls from taking up opportunities that could potentially make them and their families less vulnerable to poverty. Capacity enhancement for women in impoverished countries can begin with the simple initiative of access to microfinance. Women in villages and communities can grow and prosper by having the finances to purchase, for instance, a sewing machine. This simple act that we in developed countries take for granted can mean freedom from abuse for women and their children in many developing countries.

Violence against women and children is always an area of particular concern. A measure that is needed to support legislative change and more effective law and justice responses or support services for women and children is public advocacy by civil society organisations. In fact, women and children need easy access to legal prosecution options and avenues so that they can be protected. This, as I indicated, must be an easily accessible option for women and children in developing countries.

The white paper on Australia's overseas aid program has gender as an overarching principle. Australia's commitment requires that the views, needs, interests and rights of women and girls shape the development agenda as much as those of men and boys; that women and men participate in and benefit equally from aid programs; and that development supports progress towards equality between women and men and between boys and girls. Our Australian aid program is also taking steps to improve the economic status of women and to promote the equal participation of women in decision-making and leadership, including the promotion and protection of the human rights of women and girls in the law and justice sector service delivery. The Australian aid program is also taking steps to promote equitable health and education outcomes for women and children and to advance issues of gender equality in

regional cooperation efforts. I am very proud of the process that the Australian government has undertaken in the past few years with its aid programs.

The aid program established a human rights fund of \$2.5 million in 2006-2007, which supports the very issues I am interested in. These issues in particular are supported in the Human Rights Small Grants Scheme for mostly non-government organisation projects—for example, raising the profile of children's rights in Fiji. The small grant projects are a fantastic opportunity for women and children to get the support they require.

Human rights are also supported through bilateral, regional and non-government organisation programs. For example, Australia's assistance to Papua New Guinea's law and justice sector has improved access to justice and promoted the rights of women and children. Public prosecutors and investigators have been trained in sexual assault law, and the operation of village court systems has been improved through a major training program for court officials.

In closing, might I say that I am very proud of our process and our actions, and I urge the Australian government to proceed even further in ensuring those rights of access for women and children to the legal system. (*Time expired*)

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)**—Is the motion seconded?

**Mrs Moylan**—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

**Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (1.23 pm)**—I rise to speak in support of the private member's motion regarding Australian aid programs. This motion examines Australian aid programs and their impact on eradicating corruption in developing countries, overcoming poverty, strengthening democratic institutions and eliminating gender based discrimination.

Through years of neglect, Australia's development assistance has lost its focus on poverty reduction. An independent report by the OECD confirmed that Australia needs to place greater attention on reducing global poverty. Australia has been criticised for supplying 'boomerang aid', where large amounts of aid finds itself in the pockets of Australian consultants and not in the hands of locals for local services or for directly addressing the problem of poverty. More aid needs to reach the poor and disadvantaged groups within society that are struggling to survive.

Australia delivers one of the lowest levels of development assistance compared with other developed countries. Australia's development assistance should directly target the reduction of poverty. We believe that in order for us to seriously tackle poverty we must deliver development assistance at a grassroots level. It has been proved that development assistance at this level is the most effective at combating poverty. Our

country has the resources, expertise and generosity to design and implement projects targeted at the grassroots which will help eliminate poverty. According to the organisation Make Poverty History, extreme poverty kills 30,000 children every day. Poverty not only kills but also contributes to international insecurity. Extreme poverty has been linked to political and economic instability, human rights abuse, unrest and war, uncontrolled migration and population growth, and environmental degradation.

We as a nation have not done enough to provide development assistance to the world's least developed countries. The key objectives of the Australian Aid Program should be to work with developing countries to realise the Millennium Development Goals. The Millennium Development Goals should be used as the new framework Australia follows for global overseas development assistance. These goals have the ability to improve the relationship that developed and developing countries share and to improve the effectiveness of Australia's aid program. The goals provide a clear vision and framework for halving extreme poverty by 2015 and ending it altogether by 2025. Three of the Millennium Development Goals relate specifically to the issues raised by the member for Riverina. These goals include to promote gender equality and empower women, to reduce child mortality and to improve maternal health. Australia's overseas aid program should involve a cooperative partnership with developing countries. The aid program, within the context of the Millennium Development Goals, will do this.

We need to incorporate the poor in economic and social development and allow for the establishment of activities which enable women to contribute to and benefit from development. In order to promote these activities, we must support and improve the health and education of women. In addition to this, a human rights framework should characterise Australia's overseas aid program. Recipient countries should respect the human rights of their people, including those of their indigenous peoples. However, we should err on the side of caution in not imposing donor values and structures on developing countries through development assistance.

I welcome the fact that the government has responded to community pressure and announced that it will increase Australia's development assistance from the embarrassingly low levels to which it has fallen. However, Australia is still one of the few developed countries that to date has failed to produce an action plan for its Millennium Development Goals. Australians will benefit from a more secure world, which will be achieved only when fewer people face desperate circumstances and appalling living conditions every day.

Australians are a very generous people, as we saw in the moving response to the Asian tsunami from right

across the community. The generosity is also displayed by the support that Australians have given to the organisation Make Poverty History. The support that this organisation has gained from the Australian community demonstrates the willingness of the Australian population to assist in the global fight against poverty. It is time that Australia made a commitment to eliminating poverty before the end of our lifetimes. It is not enough for us to remain complacent. We need to support those in the global community who need help. Reducing global poverty should be an issue of national importance. On this side of the House we will continue to work to ensure that the government cares as much about the plight of people in extreme poverty as the Australian community does. (*Time expired*)

**Mrs MOYLAN** (Pearce) (1.29 pm)—Firstly I thank my colleague the member for Riverina for bringing before the House this motion on the Australian aid program. The member for Riverina was elected to the Asia-Pacific group of the Coordinating Committee of Women Parliamentarians in the IPU, the Inter-Parliamentary Union, in Kenya early last year. Those of us participating in that conference are very proud of the contribution the member for Riverina is making to the work of the IPU women's committee. The member for Riverina has made a very big impact in the IPU meetings. Some people say she is a pocket rocket—there is not much of her but she certainly has an impact—and that is true.

This motion fits well with the member for Riverina's interest in improving the participation of women in politics and her work to improve the quality of life for both women and girls. The motion supports the work of the Australian government to eradicate poverty and corruption and to strengthen democratic institutions by promoting good governance with specific reference to women and children in developing countries. I agree with my colleague the member for Hindmarsh that poverty is a huge issue that not only affects the quality of life for individuals but will also threaten regional security if it is not handled and eradicated.

It is difficult to believe that in the 21st century, when so much has been achieved in science, medicine, education and communications, women and children in developing countries are still denied basic human rights. Gender discrimination continues to thrive, denying women and children property rights, access to legal representation, employment and protection against violence and discrimination.

While recognising that much more needs to be done, the Australian government continues to provide support for improving governance within our region. The difficulty we have is that political instability and lack of security feed into the poverty cycle and put women and children at greater risk. Australia has contributed \$4 billion in aid—I think that is what the member for

Riverina said—and will contribute \$645 million in aid to women and children in the Asia-Pacific with a strong emphasis on anticorruption, leadership development, respect for women and the promotion of equal participation in public life. On top of that, Australia has been playing a very significant role in helping to restore law and order in the Solomons because, where law and order do not exist, women and children are particularly at risk, as I said, and it does feed into the poverty cycle.

Australia is also playing a very significant role, along with our Portuguese colleagues—and the member for Riverina and I recently had the opportunity along with other members of the IPU delegation to visit the Portuguese parliament and to talk to our Portuguese colleagues—in continuing to work in East Timor to build institutions that will give East Timor stability and to provide opportunities for women to establish microbusinesses to employ young people. We know that providing microcredit to women has very positive outcomes. World Bank research shows that women make an effective contribution to government in postconflict situations. Women's influence leads efforts to fight corruption and to establish accountability processes at both a national and local level. Where women and men are relatively equal, economies tend to grow faster and poverty reduction is more rapid. It makes sense for developing countries to use the talents and abilities of the other half of their population which so often goes underutilised.

The government supports the Regional Rights Resource Team, which works in the Solomon Islands, Vanuatu and Kiribati, and also supports legal rights training officers based in Fiji, Tonga, Tuvalu and the Cook Islands. This support involves training, technical support, policy and advocacy advice in human rights, social justice and good governance in the Pacific region. It encourages leaders to embrace good governance principles—including the ratification and implementation of human rights conventions and exploring the relationship between customary law and human rights—and combat corruption.

Australia makes a significant contribution throughout the world, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region, and Australian members of parliament can play a significant role in encouraging more women in the region to take on positions of leadership. (*Time expired*)

**Mr McMULLAN** (Fraser) (1.34 pm)—I congratulate the member for Riverina for her initiative in putting the matter of the Australian aid program on the agenda. I know her interest and commitment in this area. We have done a few things together around countries in our region. Following the recent tsunami, millions of Australians think global poverty and inequality are important enough to put up their own money every fortnight, every month and every year. The Make Pov-

erty History campaign and the Millennium Development Goals show that young Australians in particular are very committed in this area. If we in this parliament and all governments can convince Australians that their aid dollar will work then they can be encouraged to support increased government efforts to tackle the problem of poverty, and that is a matter to which we need to address ourselves.

With more than 800 million people living in poverty, two-thirds of them in our region, the reduction of poverty should be the one true focus of the Australian aid program. The reduction of poverty benefits Australia's national interest by creating a more secure world in which fewer people face desperate circumstances and appalling living conditions every day.

As the shadow minister responsible for international development assistance, I want to use this opportunity to call for a restoration of balance between the focus on poverty reduction—basic services like health and education, employment, assistance with governance and capacity building—and the focus on corruption. All those things need to be part of a package, but I think Australia as a nation has had the balance wrong in recent times and we need to tilt it back towards poverty reduction, basic services and employment.

It is very appropriate that we are discussing this today because ASPI, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, has today put out a paper, by Roland Rich, which has a number of important things to say about this subject. I want to mention just two things in the time available. In his talk about capacity building, Roland Rich has raised what I think is a very important point: we need to do more about training the Australians we send overseas to assist. Many of the people who go out to do this job—many of them are my constituents because they are often Commonwealth public servants—find that people are well motivated and sometimes achieve excellent results. But, as a strategic policy objective, we have to fund more training for those people so that, to make sure we have enhanced quality assurance of the training that is provided, we are maximising the benefit of the hours, commitment and dollars that we are providing.

Roland Rich has also raised an important point about enhancing the role of the private sector in Australia in enhancing enterprise development in developing countries. His paper takes an innovative look at the way in which we can generate more employment opportunities and economic growth in developing countries and it warrants more research. I cannot say at the moment that I endorse everything he says, but he is making a very important case and it deserves to be looked at.

I welcome the member for Riverina's focus on the enhanced role of women and the relevant Millennium Development Goals on which our aid projects need to

focus. All the evidence shows that investment in women's health and education is the best form of effective investment in economic development—and in national and social development. Most of the money in microcredit goes to women for two very simple reasons: they are best at paying it back and they make best use of it for economic development and to assist their families. Finance providers give microcredit to women not because of issues of gender equity; they say that recognising gender equity means that you give more money to women because it works better and they pay it back more. For those reasons I think that that element of the focus and the whole question that the UNFPA has been talking about—dealing with gender equity and overcoming gender discrimination—is fundamental. We squander the fundamental investment in human capital if we do not get rid of gender discrimination.

I welcome the improvements in the aid program in the recent white paper and the Prime Minister's commitments. We have had 10 wasted years, but we do have an improvement now. I urge an enhanced policy focus on the Millennium Development Goals. If the government gets the focus right, Australians of good heart will support them.

**Mrs ELSON (Forde)** (1.39 pm)—I am very pleased to support the motion by the member for Riverina and to be part of a government that is actively working to ensure our overseas aid program does focus on the things that really matter. The simple fact is that, unless we continue to demand more of the governments in the countries whose citizens we are seeking to help, we cannot expect long-term solutions to their problems. What is more, I firmly believe we have a right to demand more and to speak out against practices that we know are wrong.

There are some in this House who think that aid and assistance should be unconditional—that the purpose of helping is simply to feed the hungry and to provide housing and the other basics that their governments have failed to deliver—and that we should not be involved in the politics of any particular nations. There are people who feel we have no right to impose on another culture our values, our beliefs, our legal system and our sense of fairness. To a point, that argument has some merit, but, when cultural sensitivity is used as an excuse to turn a blind eye to blatant injustice, it is just not on. It is also common sense that, by promoting good governance and working to eliminate injustice and corruption, we can vastly improve the situation of many impoverished nations.

It is a sad fact that gender based discrimination is one of the injustices that we see occurring in many impoverished nations. For example, I saw on the news just this weekend that the UN has released a report that finds the number of so-called honour killings of

women in Pakistan has more than doubled in the past year. This is surely evidence of the need for all nations to put more pressure on the Pakistani government to ensure equal rights for women and, in particular, equal access to the justice system.

Unfortunately, some of these barbaric practices against women—honour killing being an example—are culturally based. I believe that in the modern world there can be no place for this kind of culture. Adherence to these primitive and barbaric rituals should not be tolerated by any person or any nation. Of course, honour killings are an extreme example of discrimination, but many other forms of gender inequality are often entrenched in the laws, policies and systems of developing countries.

In the developing nations to which we give aid, men, women and children all suffer, but, in many instances, women and children are much worse off than men are. When I travelled to Africa as part of a parliamentary delegation to examine our overseas aid programs in Mozambique and Kenya, I saw firsthand the benefits of Australian aid, particularly for the women and children in those countries. Until you witness firsthand the massive difference that the Australian government is making to the lives of women and children, you cannot really judge whether we give enough money or not. Australia gave \$42,000 to put bores in remote communities. I opened a bore where previously the women and children had to go down to the river to get water—the men did not get the water because of the danger of being eaten by crocodiles. That was \$42,000 well spent by the Australian government.

In those countries, our aid has a very strong education focus—education being the key to eradicating poverty and also, hopefully, to addressing injustice and gender discrimination. We have a successful ‘school for food’ program, in which we encourage young children to access education, and a tremendous ‘work for food’ program, which helps women to develop work projects that can sustain them in the future. I saw firsthand a project which, for the first time in the women’s lives, gave them control of the money coming into their family and gave their children a better chance at life.

Giving women access to some degree of economic freedom is the first step in giving them access to a greater level of participation in communities and in politics. It is very interesting to note that, by helping women to have equal rights, status and participation in the political process, we can also reduce corruption and poverty overall. Research by the World Bank has found that, where the influence of women in public life is greater, the overall level of corruption is lower. When women and men are relatively equal, economies tend to grow faster and the poor move out of poverty much quicker.

As I said at the outset, by addressing gender inequality we can do much to address the overall problems faced by developing countries. I am very pleased to support this motion today, to note the contribution of the Australian aid program and to thank all of those people who work overseas to deliver our programs.

**Ms PLIBERSEK** (Sydney) (1.43 pm)—I would like to associate myself with, in particular, part 3 of the motion, which supports the elimination of gender based discrimination, particularly against young girls. We all know it is not just the quantity of aid we give that matters but also the quality of aid. Australia can certainly play a role in eliminating discrimination against women and girls in developing countries. Previous speakers have mentioned microcredit. Microcredit is a very important way of improving the status of women in developing nations. Another very important focus is the education of girls. Two-thirds of the world’s illiterate population are female. Without improving that figure we will never really tackle the economic exclusion of women. But it is not just about their economic exclusion; it is also about the health effects. We know that, where mothers are literate, not just their own health is vastly better but also the health of their children. Australia has a very generous population. We are personally very generous but we could do a lot more to—

**The SPEAKER**—Order! It being 1.45 pm, the debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 34. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting. The member will have leave to continue speaking when the debate is resumed on a future day.

#### STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

##### Airport Security

**Mr MURPHY** (Lowe) (1.45 pm)—On 9 August 2006 the Minister for Justice and Customs answered my question No. 3391 in relation to tampering with CCTV cameras in the baggage area of Sydney airport controlled by Customs. That answer confirmed that on 23 October 2004 a camera was found to have no focus. On 26 January 2005 a second camera was found to be facing the wall. On 30 January the original camera, camera No. 1, was also found to be facing the wall. Mr Speaker, I asked a whole series of questions of the minister about that on 9 and 10 August last year, and last week I asked you in the parliament, under standing order 105(b), to follow these questions up to get answers. It is not good enough for the minister to say that, while on three occasions in a very highly sensitive area these cameras were out of focus or pointing to a wall, nevertheless, because of the overlap factor, the other fields of view were picked up by cameras that were operating properly. People need to know why these cameras were interfered with in one of the most highly sensitive areas. The government prides itself on

national security, yet on three separate occasions cameras in a highly sensitive area were interfered with. We need to know why. (*Time expired*)

#### **Shirley Su-Lan Huang**

**Mr HARDGRAVE** (Moreton) (1.47 pm)—Last weekend I joined with hundreds of other local people to celebrate the life of Shirley Su-Lan Huang. Shirley Huang came to Australia to settle in 1988. She was in every possible way a pioneer of the enormous number of Taiwanese born residents in the electorate of Moreton. Shirley worked to support and settle others who followed her from Taiwan. Now some 20,000 Taiwanese born people and their children—their ABCs, Australian born Chinese—live in and around Sunnybank. Shirley sponsored great charitable acts, large and small. Be it helping the Warrigal Road State Primary School or the Sunnybank State High School or perhaps fundraising for typhoon and earthquake victims back in Taiwan, Shirley Huang was always there. She helped form the Queensland Chinese Forum, the Taiwanese Friendship Group and the Taiwan Women's League—all in their own right wonderful supporters of our community. In 2000, on my recommendation, Shirley Huang was appointed by the Howard government to be one of the first members of the Council for a Multicultural Australia. To that she took the same style and approach of helping to bring people of all backgrounds and beliefs together. She was appointed by President Chen Shui-bian of the Taiwanese government to be a commissioner for overseas compatriot affairs. She was appreciated by both nations. Her final tribute to her love for Australia was that, even though she died unexpectedly in Taipei, she saw her final resting place to be here in Australia. Shirley Huang, we salute you. To her husband, Jerry, to Steven, to Jack and to her ABCs Jessica and Johnathon: thank you for sharing Shirley with all of us. (*Time expired*)

#### **Melbourne Ports Electorate: Multifaith Service**

**Mr DANBY** (Melbourne Ports) (1.48 pm)—Late last year I had the opportunity to attend the Sisters of the Little Company of Mary, Mary Potter week multi-faith service at Calvary Health Care Bethlehem—which I am sure will interest the member for Lowe. Mary Potter and her devoted sisters established this wonderful hospital and health care centre many years ago in my electorate with the values of hospitality, healing, stewardship and respect. At the launch of Mary Potter Week I had the opportunity to meet many of the original sisters who formed this health care provider in the area of South Caulfield. I am particularly grateful to a lovely woman, Dr Jane Fischer, the Acting Chief Executive of Bethlehem Hospital, for organising this ceremony. People from all faiths participated in this ceremony remembering the work of Mary Potter. It opened with a very moving ceremony by Vicki Walker from Aboriginal Catholic Ministry. She held a land,

fire and earth ceremony to open the events of the day. Bethlehem Hospital continues to provide comprehensive care to the people of the electorate of Melbourne Ports. The original mission of the Sisters of the Little Company of Mary has been continued by the professionals around Dr Fischer. Their ability to reach out to the community and get support from across the spectrum in our local community is a great credit to them, as they continue their work. I am very pleased to have been involved in this uplifting service and I commend them very much for their continuing work in the vision of that great and selfless exemplar Mary Potter. (*Time expired*)

#### **Agriculture: Irrigation**

**Mrs HULL** (Riverina) (1.50 pm)—I rise today to congratulate Coleambally Irrigation Cooperative Ltd, or CICL, on their successful application to do with the most timely and biggest issue on our agenda at the moment and their receipt of \$12.53 million for irrigation practices. Coleambally Irrigation is most innovative and is full of aspirations in the area of ensuring water efficiency. It has received \$12.53 million to implement an exciting project which will demonstrate the benefits of an integrated set of cost-effective control sensor and communication technologies for improving water-use efficiency in irrigation on a very large scale. The project will remove barriers to improved water-use efficiency in one of Australia's major irrigation districts. This project will be used to demonstrate the capacity of a community based approach to effectively encourage water users to adopt a wide range of technologies and measures to improve water-use efficiency, optimise productive capacity and improve the cash-flow position of individual farming enterprises. The project outcomes will showcase the benefits of integrating existing technology and provide fundamental learnings for other national communities on ways in which to deliver positive change, particularly in water-use patterns in established open-channel irrigation areas. (*Time expired*)

#### **Ms Joan Burke**

**Ms BURKE** (Chisholm) (1.51 pm)—Today I want to tell the House about one of my great constituents, who is one of my harshest critics but one of my greatest fans. I had the joy at the end of last year of attending her final school assembly, after 46 years of dedication to the Catholic education department, at the small inner city school where she had worked for the last 23 years. I want to say well done to my mum, Joan Burke, who spent the last 46 years teaching and the last 23 of them at the same school. She has instilled in thousands of people the joy of reading. She is a great educationalist, and I just want to say well done.

#### **Work Choices**

**Mr BARTLETT** (Macquarie) (1.52 pm)—Last weekend a Your Rights at Work rally was held at Lith-

gow, in the new part of my electorate. I certainly accept people's rights to engage in such rallies and to demonstrate in whichever way they like, so long as it is peaceful, and I acknowledge the bona fides of many of the workers who attend them. But I want to put on record my disappointment with the deceit that we continue to hear from union leaders and the ALP about the government's Work Choices legislation. We continue to hear claims that this legislation will result in mass dismissals, yet we have seen almost 250,000 new jobs created, most of them full time, since this legislation was passed. We heard that wages would be driven down, yet the first decision of the Fair Pay Commission was a rise in the minimum wage of \$27 a week. We heard that there would be mass industrial unrest, yet we have the lowest level of industrial disputation on record. The best chance of a job and higher wages is with strong economic management and a productive economy. That is what we have seen under this government and that is what would be at threat if there were a change to a Labor government.

#### **HMAS *Voyager***

**Mr SAWFORD** (Port Adelaide) (1.53 pm)—Saturday, 10 February, was a stark reminder of one of the great naval tragedies in peacetime in Australia, and that is the sinking of the *Voyager*, the Daring class destroyer that on 10 February 1964 was cut in half by the aircraft carrier *Melbourne*, with the loss of 82 lives—81 naval personnel and one naval employee. On Saturday morning at the Naval Memorial Gardens in Adelaide, I, along with others, attended the 43rd anniversary of the sinking of the *Voyager*. Navy chaplain Ray Prettijohn led the ceremony, and people from all over Australia attended the memorial service. On the Saturday night I also attended the reunion at the Port Adelaide Naval Association. It was a stark reminder that when you serve in Australian military forces, even in peacetime, it can be a very dangerous occupation, one that creates lasting memories for the families. To all of the people involved, particularly the committee who organised the memorial service and the dinner, I say congratulations.

#### **Airport Security**

**Mr MURPHY** (Lowe) (1.55 pm)—I again raise the issue of two security cameras on three occasions being interfered with at Sydney airport and the questions to the Minister for Justice and Customs that are outstanding on the *Notice Paper*. The readers of the *Daily Telegraph* and anyone who is concerned with security at Sydney airport want to know why on three separate occasions, on 23 October 2004, 26 January 2005 and 30 January 2005, CCTV cameras in the baggage make-up area of Sydney airport were interfered with. I have been trying to get answers out of the minister for customs for more than 12 months. The government is failing the fundamental test of protecting our national se-

curity. Sydney airport is a high-risk security area, and on three occasions two cameras were interfered with in the baggage make-up area. The *Daily Telegraph* readers want to know why, my constituents want to know why and anyone who uses Sydney airport wants to know why three cameras were found pointing to the wall or put out of focus. Mr Speaker, I have been trying to get answers for 12 months and I have asked you to follow up questions. Minister Ellison is refusing to answer those questions. It is not good enough to say that there were other cameras that picked up the fields of vision. Why were those cameras interfered with in the first place? We want answers, the *Daily Telegraph* want answers and the users of the airport want answers. (*Time expired*)

#### **Corangamite Electorate: Investing In Our Schools Program**

**Mr McARTHUR** (Corangamite) (1.56 pm)—I want to put on the public record the thanks of the schools in the electorate of Corangamite for \$2.8 million that the Howard government has provided to look after the state schools in Corangamite. Thirty-six schools across Corangamite have received this funding under the third round of the Investing in Our Schools program. The Howard government is committed, as you all know, to higher standards and an improvement in values in our schools. The particular point about this program is that the parents and the school principals have worked on the submissions. I personally have been pleased to make the announcements at some of the local schools throughout the length and breadth of Corangamite. The schools that have received the funding include Alvie Consolidated School; Colac College; Colac High School; Grovedale College; Mount Duneed Regional Primary School; Rokewood Primary School, which I visited; Shelford Primary School; and Torquay Primary School. A number of other smaller schools have also enjoyed these extra grants, which have provided much-needed facilities such as computers, outdoor equipment and some of the smaller items that the state government might not have provided. These schools, their principals and the parents are delighted with these allocations of grants. I commend the government on this very important initiative.

#### **Airport Security**

**Mr MURPHY** (Lowe) (1.58 pm)—I again raise the question of why, on three occasions, two CCTV security cameras in the Customs baggage make-up area of Sydney international airport were interfered with: on 23 October 2004, out of focus; on 26 January 2005, pointing to the wall; and on 30 January 2005, pointing to the wall. Sydney airport is a high-risk security area. I am pleased the Prime Minister has come into the chamber. Minister Ellison needs to tell the *Daily Telegraph* readers and all the people who use Sydney airport why two CCTV cameras were interfered with on

three separate occasions. How could that possibly happen? I am glad the Prime Minister is listening. I ask you to ask Minister Ellison: why were those cameras interfered with—pointed to the wall or put out of focus? It is just not good enough to say that there are another 50 cameras there and they are picking up the field of vision. The *Daily Telegraph* readers want to know why those cameras were interfered with in the first place. The government prides itself on national security. Well, it has failed the most fundamental test at Sydney airport. One camera was found to be out of focus and in the very same area, within a few months, two more cameras were found to be pointing to the wall. I ask again: why, why, why? Why were those cameras interfered with? It is not good enough to say that they were other cameras picking up those fields of vision. I ask the Prime Minister to tell Minister Ellison to answer my questions on the *Notice Paper* today.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! It being 2 pm, the time for members' statements has concluded.

#### MINISTERIAL ARRANGEMENTS

**Mr HOWARD** (Bennelong—Prime Minister) (2.00 pm)—I inform the House that the Minister for Industry, Tourism and Resources will be absent from question time today and for the remainder of this week. He is hosting the APEC mining ministers meeting in Perth. The Minister for Trade will answer questions on his behalf.

#### QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

##### Iraq

**Mr RUDD** (2.00 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister withdraw his statement that al-Qaeda is praying for a Democrat to become the next President of the United States?

**Mr HOWARD**—I do not retract the statements that I made yesterday, and let me say the reference to the Democrats was in the context of Senator Obama being the candidate. Let me make that very clear. What is my starting point on this matter is that an American defeat in Iraq would be a catastrophe for the West, and an American withdrawal from Iraq anytime in the next 12 or 18 months, which is effectively what is being advocated by a number of people and effectively, by definition, because he wants to pull our forces out in that time, by the Leader of the Opposition. If you think that the consequence of that withdrawal is a figment of my imagination, can I read to you an extract from the latest national intelligence assessment, which was issued late in January of this year. The coverage of it has largely surrounded its references to whether or not there is a civil war, but what has not been covered is the following:

If Coalition forces were withdrawn rapidly during the term of this Estimate—

and the term of the estimate, as the Leader of the Opposition knows, is 12 to 18 months from January 2007—

we judge that this almost certainly would lead to a significant increase in the scale and scope of sectarian conflict in Iraq, intensify Sunni resistance to the Iraqi Government, and have adverse consequences for national reconciliation.

It then goes on to say:

- If such a rapid withdrawal were to take place—

and that is what is being advocated by many people, not only in the United States but also here in Australia, including by the Leader of the Opposition—

we judge that the (Iraqi Security Force) would be unlikely to survive as a non-sectarian national institution; neighboring countries—invited by Iraqi factions or unilaterally—might intervene openly in the conflict; massive civilian casualties and forced population displacement would be probable; (al-Qaeda) would attempt to use parts of the country—particularly al-Anbar province—to plan increased attacks in and outside of Iraq; and spiraling violence and political disarray in Iraq, along with Kurdish moves to control Kirkuk and strengthen autonomy, could prompt Turkey to launch a military incursion.

That is the latest American national intelligence assessment. I repeat that if the United States were to withdraw her combat units from Iraq by the early part of next year it could only be represented as a defeat for the United States in Iraq. I hold the strongest possible view that it is contrary to the security interests of this country for America to be defeated in Iraq. I know that the Americans are going through a difficult time in relation to Iraq; that is obvious. That is precisely the time when friends should be available to stick by you, when you are going through a difficult time.

I notice that the Leader of the Opposition on 10 January said that, if he were elected, 'We would withdraw the Australian forces within a reasonable time frame so that we would not leave our American ally immediately in the lurch.' Immediately in the lurch, he says—in other words, he would leave them in the lurch but he would fudge it so it did not look as though it were immediate. I am amazed that the Leader of the Opposition and others on his front bench should criticise my criticism of remarks made by a candidate for the Democrat nomination. Apparently it is in order for any number of people in the Labor Party to regularly attack George Bush, to regularly attack the American administration. That is okay, but dare anybody criticise somebody who might agree with them on Iraq and then somehow or other I am interfering in the domestic politics of the United States. Let me make it perfectly clear: if I hear a policy being advocated that is contrary to Australia's security interests I will criticise it.

#### Climate Change

**Mr BAIRD** (2.05 pm)—My question is addressed to the Prime Minister. Would the Prime Minister advise the House of the implications for Australia if Senator



Bob Brown's recommendation in relation to the coal industry were to be followed?

**Mr HOWARD**—I thank the member for Cook for his question. Can I say in reply that, as a community, as we debate ways of responding effectively to climate change we must do it in a calm, balanced and practical fashion. We must not be panicked into adopting measures that are going to damage Australia's economy and destroy Australian jobs. Already a number of dangerous proposals have emerged, and the chief amongst those of course is the proposal of the Leader of the Australian Greens, Senator Brown, that we should phase out coal exports from this country.

This is a prime example of what happens when you get knee-jerk as opposed to measured, calm, balanced and responsible responses to climate change issues. I might also mention in the context of the future of the coal industry that it is worth reminding the House that the Labor Party's shadow minister in the environment area, the member for Kingsford Smith, has said that an expanding coal industry is a thing of the past. Bob Brown says you ought to phase it out, and the member for Kingsford Smith, the shadow minister for the environment, says that it is a thing of the past. And we all know who is furiously trying to get Greens preferences in the state of Queensland—none other than the Leader of the Opposition.

Let me point out to the House that Australia is the largest coal exporter in the world. Those exports are worth \$24 billion to the Australian economy every year by way of exports. The coal industry employs thousands of Australians and is pivotal, crucial and central to the livelihood of many communities around Australia. Let me simply say that to close down coal exports would do great injury to Australia, cost thousands of Australians their jobs and visit enormous hardship on many regional communities. I have seen in recent years regional communities threatened through the adoption of misguided policies or understandings of policies urged upon major parties by the Australian Greens. I saw it in Tasmania in 2004.

*Mr Tanner interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The member for Melbourne is warned!

**Mr HOWARD**—When it came to the forestry industry this government struck the balance between the environment and job security. Let me promise the coalminers of Australia that we will do the same with climate change. We will strike a balance between the interests of dealing with climate change and also the preservation of Australian jobs. We have no intention of sacrificing the livelihoods of coalminers, their families or their communities with unfair, short-sighted, knee-jerk responses to the challenge of climate change.

### **Iraq**

**Mr RUDD** (2.09 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister and refers to his answer to my previous question. I refer to the text of the Prime Minister's statement yesterday, which he has reaffirmed in the parliament today. I quote from it:

If I was running al-Qaeda in Iraq, I would put a circle around March 2008 and be praying as many times as possible for a victory not only for Obama but also for the Democrats.

Prime Minister, how can you credibly say to the parliament today that your statement yesterday referred only to Senator Obama when, in fact, you explicitly attacked the Democratic Party as a whole?

**Mr HOWARD**—I can answer by referring to numerous occasions when the current President of the United States has been attacked personally by members who sit opposite, and then in their next breath they have said that some of their best friends are Republicans. I was not generically attacking the Democrats but, the last time I checked, Senator Obama was a member of the Democratic Party of the United States. I say to those who sit opposite: apparently it is all right for those who sit opposite to attack the Bush administration; apparently it is all right for the Leader of the Opposition to hold out to the Australian public that he would serve as foreign minister under a Labor Prime Minister in Mark Latham, who attacked not only George Bush's policies on Iraq but also his character and his competence. When the Leader of the Opposition was asked in February 2003 whether he agreed with what Mark Latham had to say, he said, 'It was an exercise in free speech.' Yet this morning on national television the Leader of the Opposition said, 'I had a little word to him privately to let him know what I really thought.' That is not good enough—what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander. The reality is that the Labor Party and the Leader of the Opposition are being two-faced on this issue. It is all right to attack Bush and when it suits you the Republicans, but, if I say anything critical of somebody on the other side of politics, I am interfering in American domestic politics. I am doing nothing of the kind and I do not retract anything I have said.

### **Economy**

**Mr BAKER** (2.12 pm)—My question is addressed to the Treasurer. In light of today's statement on the conduct of monetary policy, what is the outlook for inflation and Australia's economy?

**Mr COSTELLO**—I thank the honourable member for Braddon for his question. I can inform the House that the Reserve Bank released its latest quarterly statement on the conduct of monetary policy today, noting that inflationary pressures, which may have been picking up in the first half of last year, seem to have been now contained and indicating that it now expects underlying inflation, currently around three per

cent, to fall to 2¾ per cent in 2007-08. The Reserve Bank notes this reflects:

... both the evidence that underlying inflationary pressures in the second half of 2006 were somewhat weaker than in the first half, and the likelihood that recent falls in world oil prices will result in some dampening effect on cost pressures and inflation expectations.

That is good news because that says—and this is what I said to the House last week—that rather than inflationary pressures picking up it now appears inflationary pressures are coming down. Whereas we had an inflation rate of about 0.8 per cent in some of the quarters in the first half of last year, in quarterly terms the underlying inflation rate is closer to 0.5 per cent. That shows that expectations are well within the target band which the government has set by an agreement with the Reserve Bank of two to three per cent.

We are not out of the woods yet, because with an exceptionally cold northern winter it is possible that more pressure will come back on oil prices. This will take quite a lot of managing. In addition to that, because commodity prices are high and because unemployment is low there are risks that you could have unsustainable wage increases. That will also take quite a deal of management.

I mention in passing that one of the things that makes it easier to handle high commodity prices this time around than in other periods, such as the mid-seventies, is that we do not have centralised wage fixation. If we had a system of centralised wage fixation, which took wage settlements from profitable areas of the Australian economy and brought them back and spread them uniformly across the whole economy, then we would have the kind of inflationary breakouts that we have seen in previous mining booms.

The good thing, of course, is that we have changed the industrial relations system. It would not be possible if we had not done that. Those of us on this side of the House who supported that industrial relations system know just how important that is for Australia's future. Nothing could be more wanton and reckless than a proposal at a time like this to take industrial relations back to where they were when they let Australia down in the seventies and eighties. That is why we need the Work Choices legislation to handle a very difficult economy at a time like this.

The Leader of the Opposition would have you believe that his economic policy is our economic policy. It was on the TV on the weekend: everything that we have done he wants to do. I suppose that imitation is the greatest form of flattery and we ought to accept it, but I remind the House that, when all the heavy lifting was being done and all of the policy was being put in place, the Leader of the Opposition was voting against all of those measures. He says that he now supports an independent Reserve Bank with an inflation target.

Labor opposed it. Labor said that it was illegal. Labor promised to sue me for putting it in place. They now say that they are in favour of balanced budgets, but they voted against balanced budgets and said it would take the economy into recession. They now say they are in favour of reducing government debt, but they did everything they could to stop us wiping out \$96 billion of Commonwealth debt. They will now have you believe they are in favour of the Future Fund, but they did nothing to set it up and they have promised to raid it.

They will now have you believe that they are in favour of a more competitive tax system, but they voted against the GST and are in favour, therefore, of keeping FID and BAD tax and stamp duty on shares. They voted against all of those changes which this government put in place, and, of course, many of those tax cuts which the government introduced in 2000, 2003, 2004, 2005 and 2006 they also opposed. Labor opposed all of the hard work to get us to where we now are and they now want to take credit. It is not believable, and the public of Australia should not believe it.

#### **Iraq**

**Mr RUDD** (2.18 pm)—My question again is to the Prime Minister and it refers to his answer to my previous question. How can the Prime Minister truthfully say in parliament today that he was not generically attacking the Democratic Party as a whole when he said:

If I were running al-Qaeda in Iraq, I would put a circle around March 2008 and be praying as many times as possible for a victory not only for Obama but also for the Democrats.

Prime Minister, can you explain how this statement about the Democratic Party, which holds a majority in both houses of the United States congress, serves the Australian national interest in any way whatsoever?

**Mr HOWARD**—I think any statement by a leading political figure in Australia that expresses a concern about the consequences of a policy position for the security interests of this country is both legitimate and in the national interest. I remind the Leader of the Opposition that my starting point on this is that an American defeat in Iraq would be a catastrophe for the West. That is what is involved here, not his ego or my ego or the ego of George Bush or Barack Obama. What is involved here are the consequences for the West of an American defeat in Iraq. That is what we have to focus our minds on.

*Honourable member interjecting—*

**Mr HOWARD**—I heard somebody saying, 'Already it's happened.' I picked that up. Let me say it again and slowly so the Leader of the Opposition takes it in. It will be a catastrophe for the West if America is defeated in Iraq and, if America pulls out her combat brigades by March 2008, which is the gist of the

Obama bill before the congress, that will be seen around the world as a defeat for the United States in Iraq. If you disbelieve me read that national intelligence assessment.

Finally, in relation to the Democrats, I remind the Leader of the Opposition that in the years I have been Prime Minister I have worked very closely with both Democrat and Republican presidents. I would also remind the House that the first occasion as Prime Minister that I was responsible for sending Australian forces to the Iraq theatre was in fact in response to a request from the Democrat President Bill Clinton.

#### **DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

**The SPEAKER** (2.21 pm)—I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon the Hon. Judy Madigan, the former Speaker of the Victorian parliament. On behalf of the House, I extend to her a very warm welcome.

**Honourable members**—Hear, hear!

#### **QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

##### **Water**

**Mr BRUCE SCOTT** (2.21 pm)—My question is addressed to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Transport and Regional Services. Would the Deputy Prime Minister outline to the House the importance of cooperation between all stakeholders in the implementation of the coalition's \$10 billion national water security plan? Why is this plan important to regional economies, including in my electorate of Maranoa in Queensland?

**Mr VAILE**—I thank the member for Maranoa for his question. He has an obvious interest in this issue, given that his electorate of Maranoa covers most of the Queensland section of the Murray-Darling Basin and Maranoa actually represents about six per cent of basin water use. So it is a critically important issue in south-western Queensland, particularly in the electorate of Maranoa.

Last week I indicated that the value of irrigated agriculture to the Australian economy is \$9 billion. It is critically important. So \$9 billion worth of agricultural product is produced through irrigation—about 25 per cent of all agricultural production. Of course, that equals a lot of jobs. There are about 40,400 farm businesses that rely on irrigation: about one-third of all the farming enterprises or entities that exist in Australia rely on irrigation. Sixteen per cent of people employed in the Murray-Darling Basin are actually engaged in agriculture, compared with 4.6 per cent across the entire nation's workforce. So 16 per cent in the Murray-Darling Basin and 4.6 per cent nationally—that is the percentage of the workforce engaged in agriculture. Those statistics are critically important.

The whole objective of our \$10 billion water strategy or proposal is water security, and water security in

these areas, these communities and these industries equals job security. Remember that, Mr Speaker: water security in the Murray-Darling Basin equals job security.

A lot of work has already been done by industry through the initiatives of the former Deputy Prime Minister, John Anderson, and the National Water Initiative. We need to build on that hard work and the commitment that has been made. We recognise that, and it is terribly important in this debate today. We certainly intend to work very closely with industry and with irrigators.

To that end, later on this week the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources and I are going to meet with a delegation from the National Farmers Federation and irrigator groups to work through some of the issues and to reconfirm to them that we recognise the hard work that has been done and the contribution they have made and that our objective is to save water and secure water for the future so we can secure jobs in the basin for the future. It is critically important that we recognise that. Our goals are to secure the futures of the farming families throughout that region and throughout regional Australia.

The \$10 billion plan that we have put forward is a bigger investment than the Snowy Mountains scheme. This is critically important to the nation. The basin runs across state borders; it needs to be seen as a national issue. That is the point the Prime Minister raised with the premiers last week. So we want to engage with industry and we want to engage with the state governments because this is about building a secure future in the Murray-Darling Basin system—because water security equals job security, and there is nothing more important in Australia today than job security.

##### **Iraq**

**Mr RUDD** (2.25 pm)—My question is again to the Prime Minister and refers to his answer to my previous question. I refer also to the Prime Minister's continued affirmation of his statement yesterday that the Democratic Party was al-Qaeda's preferred party to win the next US presidential elections. Can the Prime Minister explain how his statement about the Democratic Party being al-Qaeda's party of choice will in any way help Australia's national interests when Democratic legislators, who now control the House and the Senate in the US, sit down to draft the next US farm bill, which directly impacts the interests of the Australian farm sector?

**Mr HOWARD**—I have told the Leader of the Opposition in reply to other questions, and I am very happy to say it again, that the central issue here is the consequences of an American defeat in Iraq. If America is defeated in Iraq, the setback will be for the cause of the West not only in the Middle East but also in our part of the world. I remain critical of any policy es-

poused by any individual—and I was talking yesterday about an individual—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The Prime Minister has the call.

*Ms Gillard interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The Deputy Leader of the Opposition is warned.

**Mr HOWARD**—that is going to encourage the view that the United States will pull out precipitately of Iraq. My criticism of the Leader of the Opposition is that if it is all right for Australia to leave precipitately—although he is now saying he will not leave our ally in the lurch immediately; he will still leave them in the lurch but he will not leave them in the lurch immediately—then why isn't it all right for the Americans, why isn't it all right for the British? That is what is at stake here. If it is all right for us to go, it is all right for them to go, and if we go precipitately then that is an unbelievable setback for the West. It is a setback for the Western cause in the Middle East, and it will give great encouragement and succour to the terrorists not only in that region but also in our part of the world. Now, that goes to our national interest and that is why I will not in any way resile from criticising statements that I believe are contrary to that national interest.

#### Coal Exports

**Mr TICEHURST** (2.28 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Trade. Would the minister advise the House how the government has supported the responsible development of Australia's export coal industry? Are there any threats to the billions in exports this industry provides to the nation?

**Mr TRUSS**—I thank the honourable member for Dobell, who knows full well the importance of the coal industry to Australia. As the Prime Minister mentioned, the coal industry represents \$24.3 billion worth of exports this year; one in eight of our export dollars comes from coal. We export to 38 countries and help fuel much of the economic expansion of Britain, Japan, China, India and a host of other countries in and near our region.

It is important, in the context of the greenhouse debate, to note that Australia's coal is far cleaner and produces lower greenhouse gas emissions than, say, Chinese coal. The Australian government has been investing significantly, in partnership with the industry itself, in clean coal technologies to further lower emissions. Indeed, we have committed around half a billion dollars to clean coal technologies. In addition, our government has been working constructively with the industry to help upgrade the coal industry's infrastructure, including massive developments to get rid of some of the bottlenecks in the Hunter Valley rail network. The Deputy Prime Minister recently opened the

Sandgate rail flyover, which is part of a \$380 million investment to lift the capacity of the Hunter Valley rail network to about 115 million tonnes of coal a year.

This government is committed to the coal industry. We have demonstrated our willingness to work with the industry to help make its technology cleaner and to help it achieve its maximum potential for our nation. Thirty thousand people work directly in the coal industry and another 130,000 are dependent upon that sector. The honourable member for Dobell asks, 'Are there threats?' Of course there clearly are. The Greens Senator Bob Brown declared over the weekend that he wanted to close down our coal exports and our coal fired power stations in Australia within three years. Within three years, he wants the entire great Australian coal industry to disappear.

Many may just dismiss that as the wacky Greens off again with another quite strange policy idea, but the alarming fact is that, at every election, Labor does a preference deal with the Greens. It is always prepared to trade off matters of principle to get Greens preferences. And it is at it again. There are banner headlines 'Rudd woos Queensland Greens vote'. There is one thing the Queensland Greens want: to close down all the Queensland power stations and this great industry, the biggest employer and the biggest export earner in the country.

They have a bit of sympathy in the Labor Party from the honourable member for Kingsford Smith, who said that the expansion of the coal industry is a thing of the past and a few days earlier dismissed jobs in the mining industry as being hypothetical. How many hypothetical coal industry jobs are Labor going to trade off this year for their Greens preference deal? How many jobs in the Hunter, how many jobs in the new electorate of Flynn in Queensland, the heart of the coal industry in that state, are going to be traded off for this year's Greens preference deal? Labor cannot get a candidate in Flynn and it is no wonder if they have to try to defend a policy which would close down the most significant employer in that region.

So the reality is that Labor is close to the Greens and does deals with the Greens. It identifies with this wacky policy to close down the coal industry. I call on the Leader of the Opposition to stop his negotiations with a party of that nature. Do not try to woo the vote of the Greens in Queensland; be responsible about Australia's coal industry and let them get on with earning the export dollars that are so vital to our nation's industry.

#### Iraq

**Mr RUDD** (2.32 pm)—My question, again to the Prime Minister, refers to his previous answers concerning his remarks yesterday about the Democratic Party on the question of Iraq. Given that Americans know the war in Iraq has cost them the lives of more than 3,000

service men and women, the wounding of another 20,000 and expenditures exceeding \$US360 billion, what makes the Prime Minister think he is now entitled to lecture US presidential candidates on Iraq?

**Mr HOWARD**—I simply answer that by saying what entitles me to speak of the policy views of individuals is the responsibility I have for the security interests of this country.

#### Climate Change

**Mr BROADBENT** (2.33 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for the Environment and Water Resources. Would the minister inform the House of the importance of developing clean coal technologies in addressing climate change? Is the minister aware of the criticism of the coal industry? What is the government's response?

**Mr TURNBULL**—I thank the member for McMillan and recognise his very keen interest in and commitment to the coal industry and the role of coal in the generation of electricity in his own electorate. World demand for electricity is projected to double by 2030. That growth will be driven in large measure by countries like China and India as they continue their rapid economic growth and as their citizens seek to improve their living standards. China and India are 78 per cent and 69 per cent respectively dependent on coal for electricity generation. Each of them has substantially greater coal reserves than Australia. Neither of them is blessed with significant alternative energy resources and the consequence is that, for economic and energy security reasons, both countries will continue to be heavy users of coal in the years ahead.

Australia is a major exporter of coal to the world. In addressing climate change, we must build on our natural advantages and respond in ways that do not threaten the economic prosperity or the job security of Australians. The Labor Party seems to be prepared to ignore these fundamental realities, but we are not. One of the greatest contributions Australia can make to reducing global greenhouse gas emissions is to help develop the technologies the world will need to clean up coal. China and India will continue to use coal for the bulk of their energy needs. It is only by cleaning up that coal fired generation capacity that they will be able to have economic growth, which they are entitled to, and energy growth, which they need, and at the same time reduce the growth in greenhouse gas emissions. China is the fastest-growing coal consumer in the world. It does not use coal as efficiently as it might. Leaving aside near zero emission clean coal technologies like sequestration, China has a long way to go.

*Mr Crean interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Hotham is warned!

**Mr TURNBULL**—The thermal efficiency of a coal fired power station globally is 30 per cent. In the OECD, it is 38 per cent. In China, it is 27 per cent. There is enormous potential for China to improve its energy efficiency and reduce the rapid growth in its greenhouse gas emissions.

As part of our \$2 billion comprehensive climate change strategy, the government is investing more than \$470 million in the effort to promote clean coal and carbon sequestration technologies: \$170 million through the low emissions technology demonstration fund, \$22 million to support the relevant cooperative research centres, \$19 million through projects under the AP6 Partnership on Clean Development and Climate, and, of course, as announced in January by the Prime Minister, the China-Australia clean coal initiative.

What is the Labor-Greens alliance threatening to do with coal technology?

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**Mr TURNBULL**—Well may they laugh. They can laugh away. I hope the constituents of the member for Hunter see him laughing, because the laugh will be on him when the constituents of the member for Hunter realise what the member for Kingsford Smith has in mind for them.

The Greens policy is to cease coal exports within three years—effectively shut down the coal mining industry, devastate the economy and sacrifice thousands of miners' jobs, their families and their communities. And for what? For nothing. China would simply buy its coal from somewhere else or use its own coal, of which it has vastly more in reserve than we do—and that coal is more inefficient in terms of carbon emissions than our own. What is Labor's policy? It supports clean coal, it says, but it sets an arbitrary target of 60 per cent reduction in emissions by 2050. It refuses to say what this will cost in dollars or jobs. I would ask Mr Rudd to reveal the analysis underpinning Labor's 60 per cent target. What will the impact be on our economy or on Australian jobs?

When the member for Kingsford Smith was asked what Labor's climate change policy would cost, he said, 'We don't know what paying more means.' When asked about the cost of Labor's policy on coal jobs, the member for Kingsford Smith said that it was a hypothetical question. The member for Hunter might tell him that it is not hypothetical for his constituents. Then in the *Newcastle Herald* he said:

The automatic expansion of the coal industry as we have seen in the Hunter region ... over the last decade is a thing of the past.

That is not a hypothetical answer, and the workers' jobs it threatens are real. The member for Kingsford Smith's remarks mean one of two things. Either there will be no new coalmines—that has a familiar Labor

ring about it—which means that the coal industry is doomed to die because, as every mine is exhausted and closed, no new mine will take its place, or he is simply saying that we should not mine any more coal than we are doing now, that we should put a cap on our coal production and on our exports. To what end? All that will happen is our competitors will rub their hands with glee.

The government is committed to meeting the greenhouse challenge, to reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and to helping the world reduce its greenhouse gas emissions, but doing so in a way which preserves the jobs and the economy that the Australian community depends upon.

**Mr Kelvin Thomson**—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. Could my learned friend, the minister, table the affidavit he was reading?

**The SPEAKER**—I do not think that is a point of order.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—If the member for Wills wishes to raise a serious point of order, he will do so in the proper manner.

**Mr Kelvin Thomson**—Will the minister table the document he was just reading?

**The SPEAKER**—Was the minister reading from a confidential document?

**Mr Turnbull**—Yes.

#### **DISTINGUISHED VISITORS**

**The SPEAKER** (2.41 pm)—I inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon the Rt Hon. John Hutton, the United Kingdom Secretary of State for Works and Pensions. On behalf of the House I extend to him a very warm welcome.

**Honourable members**—Hear, hear!

#### **QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

##### **Iraq**

**Mr RUDD** (2.41 pm)—My question again is to the Prime Minister and it goes to Iraq. Given that the Prime Minister has spent more than \$2 billion of Australian taxpayers' money on a war in Iraq which, four years later, has become Australia's greatest foreign policy disaster since Vietnam, what makes the Prime Minister think he is entitled to publicly lecture anybody on future directions in Iraq policy?

*Government members interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—Order! That question is close to asking for an opinion, but I will call the Prime Minister.

**Mr HOWARD**—There is a certain touch of irony when the word 'lecture' passes the lips of the Leader of the Opposition, but I will leave that aside. I guess one of the reasons why I am entitled to speak on this sub-

ject is that, when we went to the election in 2004, amongst the policies that we espoused then was the commitment we had made to Iraq. It is a matter of regret to me that the military operations, and the security situation in Iraq, have been as difficult as they have been over the past three years. I do not hide my disappointment about that, but what we must do—what the Leader of the Opposition must do and what I must do—is speak responsibly now about the consequences—

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**Mr HOWARD**—I am very happy to talk also in this answer about what the Leader of the Opposition said at the time of the operation in Iraq. I remind him of his speech to the State Zionist Council of Victoria, when he said that it was a matter of empirical fact that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction.

**Mr Wilkie**—Because you told us, you idiot!

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Swan is warned.

**Mr HOWARD**—The truth is that both the current Leader of the Opposition and the immediately preceding Leader of the Opposition were both hedging their bets three years ago. If things had gone better, they would have been saying behind their hands that the silly old leader then should not have been so strident in his opposition. What we have to do is to address the consequences of the position we take on the situation today.

My charge against the Leader of the Opposition is that his policy would be to let down our greatest ally in her hour of greatest need over Iraq. That is my criticism of the Leader of the Opposition. Self-evidently, if Australia were to withdraw her forces in Iraq, forces that have made an extremely valuable contribution, given the size of this country, to this military operation, that would not only be a material subtraction from the coalition effort in Iraq; it would also, in psychological terms, do enormous damage to the United States position. I am saying to the Leader of the Opposition that I have every right as the Prime Minister of this country to speak to the security interests of Australia. I have every right to condemn policies that would damage the security position of this country. I have every right to warn of the consequences of an American defeat in the Middle East. I have every right to warn of the boost that that would give to terrorism not only in Iraq but also in our part of the world.

The truth is that America is going through a difficult time in Iraq and there are many who will condemn the original decision. I accept my responsibility for that original decision but I say to the Leader of the Opposition and to the Australian people that if America is defeated in Iraq the consequences for the West will be catastrophic. Anybody who thinks otherwise has no understanding of international power relations. They

are the considerations that give me every right to speak to what I believe to be the national interest of my country.

### Workplace Relations

**Mr TOLLNER** (2.45 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations. Would the minister inform the House what impact the removal of unfair dismissal laws has had on small business, particularly those in the Northern Territory? What could jeopardise this improvement?

**Mr HOCKEY**—I thank the member for Solomon for his question. He told me that Sharan Burrow was up in Darwin last Friday. Her timing was impeccable. I would back the member for Solomon in an arm wrestle with Sharan Burrow any day. It would be close, but I would back him any day. The member for Solomon told me that, in the months before the introduction of Work Choices in February 2006, the unemployment rate in the Northern Territory was 6.4 per cent. Last Thursday the unemployment rate fell to two per cent. It fell from 6.4 per cent in February 2006 to two per cent last Thursday.

*Mr Laming interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The member for Bowman is interjecting from outside his seat. He is warned.

**Mr HOCKEY**—There is no doubt that small business has embraced the removal of the unfair dismissal laws and seen it as an opportunity to employ more people. I note that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition and the shadow Treasurer have been saying that job creation over the last 12 months has come from the mining industry. I dug into the figures a little bit and found that, of the 240,000 new jobs that have been created since Work Choices was introduced, 46,000 were in wholesale trade, 43,000 in construction, 34,500 in finance and insurance, and only 14,000 in mining. It is hard to believe but I think there might have been a little porky in the opposition line. It is disappointing, because job growth comes about by creating incentives for employers to employ more people. The government is not in the business of creating jobs; only business can create jobs. So removing something like the unfair dismissal laws is going to have a positive impact on job creation.

The Deputy Leader of the Opposition said yesterday that she is going to consult small business. She is walking down one side of the street saying, 'We're going to be the friend of small business; we're going to consult with them about the removal of the unfair dismissal laws,' and on the other side of the street the Labor Party and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition have voted 44 times against the removal of the unfair dismissal laws. They are on the road to Damascus. You can see Julia and Kevin holding hands, walking down

the road, telling one story to one side of the street and another story to the other side of the street.

This has happened not just on unfair dismissal. The new-found Leader of the Opposition said that he is concerned about the interests of independent contractors, yet last year the Labor Party voted in this parliament against protecting the interests of independent contractors. They are walking down one side of the street and speaking to the other side of the street at the same time. The Labor Party even pretended to be the friend of the Tristar workers, yet in this place last year the Labor Party voted against the 12-month redundancy protection for the Tristar workers. They are telling them one thing on one side of the street and voting against the workers on the other side of the street. They are going to try to run this charade of telling people one story but doing the other. We know the Labor Party's agenda; it is the union's agenda. It is to close down small business, not to create jobs, and it will lead to a deterioration in the employment and workplace relations environment. The Labor Party is about closing down jobs, not creating jobs.

### Iraq

**Mr RUDD** (2.50 pm)—My question is again to the Prime Minister on the question of Iraq. I refer to his previous answer when he stated that politicians have an obligation to speak responsibly on questions like Iraq. Does the Prime Minister believe he spoke responsibly when he said:

If I were running al-Qa'ida in Iraq, I would put a circle around March 2008 and be praying as many times as possible for a victory not only for Obama but also for the Democrats.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! Before calling the Prime Minister, I would remind the Leader of the Opposition that he is again coming close to asking for an opinion.

**Mr HOWARD**—I stand by what I have said earlier.

### Aged Care

**Mrs MARKUS** (2.51 pm)—My question is addressed to the Minister for Health and Ageing. Would the minister inform the House how the government is meeting growing needs in the aged care sector? How will this latest package help older people who wish to remain at home longer?

**Mr ABBOTT**—I thank the member for Greenway for her question and I note that in her electorate yesterday the government announced a \$1.5 billion boost to aged care services. Thanks to this latest initiative, government aged care funding will rise from some \$3 billion back in 1995 to almost \$10 billion by 2010.

There were four key elements in yesterday's announcements. First, pensioners and self-funded retirees in the same financial position will be treated the same in respect of aged care support; second, the government will increase accommodation charges to meet the

Hogan report recommendations on capital funding for high care; third, the government will increase funding for residents with high-care needs such as dementia patients; and, fourth, the government will fund a further 7,200 community aged care places, taking the total number of aged care places from under 150,000 in 1995 to almost 250,000 in total by 2010.

I would like to thank the Minister for Ageing, Senator Santoro, for putting together this package in consultation with the sector. Let me observe that this government does not just talk about health; we spend the money necessary to make a good system even better. On that point, I should thank the Treasurer, because were it not for the responsible economic management of this government we could never afford to give Australians the aged care services they need.

### Iraq

**Mr RUDD** (2.53 pm)—My question again is to the Prime Minister. I ask whether the Prime Minister recalls stating about the Iraq war three years ago in this parliament:

The reality is that the Leader of the Opposition has allowed his tribal dislike, because of the politics of the current American President, to overwhelm his concern for the national interest. Irrespective of who the President may be, it is never in the interests of this country to have that kind of generic criticism made.

Prime Minister, if that criticism was valid in relation to Mr Latham, why is it not also valid in relation to you?

**Mr HOWARD**—I do remember making that statement and I also remember that the current Leader of the Opposition regarded a statement made by Mr Latham not as something to condemn but rather as something to be supported as a robust exercise in free speech.

While I am on my feet, I also remember some things said by the Leader of the Opposition way back in 2002 in the lead-up to the Iraq war. Let me remind you what he said to the State Zionist Council of Victoria:

Saddam Hussein possesses weapons of mass destruction. That is a matter of empirical fact.

Absolutely. Chemical and biological weapons have always been possessed by him. Also:

... we've said from the beginning that Saddam Hussein does possess weapons of mass destruction.

I am very happy to go back three years ago to the lead-up to the Iraq war. I am very happy to remind the Leader of the Opposition that he, along with his immediate predecessor the member for Brand, was very lukewarm in his support of the position taken by the member for Hotham. The member for Hotham at least was forthright about his position. You were in no doubt as to where the member for Hotham stood. But the current and the former leaders of the opposition were both having two bob each way three years ago and, if the

outcome over the past three years had been different, they would have been running away from the position that the Labor Party took three years ago as fast as you can imagine it, and the member for Hotham knows that what I am saying is dead right.

### PRIME MINISTER

#### Censure Motion

**Mr RUDD** (Griffith—Leader of the Opposition) (2.56 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this House:

(1) censures the Prime Minister for:

- (a) his statement that Al-Qaeda is praying for a Democrat party candidate to win the next United States Presidential election;
- (b) his false statement today in Parliament that his statement yesterday was restricted to one US Senator and not the Democratic Party as a whole;
- (c) the damage this partisan comment has done to the United States—Australia alliance, and to Australian relations with both Democrat and Republican members of the US Congress;
- (d) the gross insensitivity of lecturing United States Presidential candidates on Iraq, when the war in Iraq is responsible for the deaths of more than 3,000 US servicemen and women, the wounding of another 20,000, and expenditures exceeding \$360 billion; and

(2) demands that he immediately and unreservedly withdraw and apologise for those comments.

How can the man who is Prime Minister of this country come into this parliament and say that he is a person of experience on the question of national security when within the last 24 hours he has made the statement that, when it comes to the operation of al-Qaeda and its dealings in the world of international affairs today, somehow al-Qaeda is a terrorist organisation that would prefer to see a Democrat win the next presidential election rather than any other representative of another political party?

The Prime Minister today has inserted that in fact he was only making a reference to Mr Obama, one of the US Democratic Party presidential candidates. It is important that we place this unequivocally on the record. Yesterday the Prime Minister gave this answer to a question in relation to the Obama plan:

Yes, I think he is wrong. I mean, he is a long way from being President of United States. I think he is wrong. I think that that would just encourage those who wanted completely to destabilise and destroy Iraq and create chaos and victory for the terrorists to hang on and to hope for an Obama victory. If I were running al Qaeda in Iraq I would put a circle around March 2008 and pray as many times as possible for a victory—not only for Obama but also for the Democrats.

That is not an addition invented by the Australian Labor Party. That is not an addition invented by anybody else. That was spoken, or would we dare say mispo-



ken, yesterday by the Prime Minister of Australia on a matter of great consequence—that is, the future of this country's relationship with the United States, particularly on the question of the future direction of Iraq policy.

To accuse the Democratic Party of the United States of being al-Qaeda's party of choice, to accuse the Democratic Party of being the terrorists' party of choice, to accuse the party of Roosevelt, Truman, Kennedy and Johnson of being the terrorists' party of choice is a most serious charge. I cannot understand how any responsible leader of this country can say to the nation that it is his serious view that the Democratic Party of the United States is the terrorists' party of choice. But these are your words, Prime Minister. I did not invent them; they are yours. In this parliament today we gave you every opportunity to say that you got it wrong.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The leader will refer his remarks through the chair.

**Mr RUDD**—We gave the Prime Minister every opportunity to say that it was wrong. It may have been that he got caught up in the flurry of the interview. It may have been that he did not hear it clearly. It may have been that he did not understand it clearly. I understand that these things can happen, but the Prime Minister was given not once, not twice but on three separate occasions in this place today an opportunity to say, 'I got that wrong; I didn't mean that.' For him to pass up each of those opportunities says much about the partisan way this Prime Minister now views the relationship with our great American ally.

Let us be absolutely clear about what is at stake here. This is not just an attack on a single US senator but an attack upon an entire political party. Here is where Australia's national interest kicks in: the Democratic Party currently controls the majority in the United States House, controls the majority in the United States Senate and, within a year or so, may control the White House itself. In this parliament today, this country's Prime Minister has reaffirmed that he describes this party as the terrorists' party of choice. This is a serious matter.

Prime Minister, can you imagine if I stood up in this parliament as the alternative Prime Minister and said to the people of Australia that the terrorists would be advantaged if the Republicans were to return to the White House at the next presidential election? Ponder for a moment how that would be regarded. How would it be seized on by those opposite? Can you imagine the reaction from those opposite if I stood at this dispatch box or appeared on national television and said that the Republicans, if they won, would cause an eruption of joy on the part of al-Qaeda and on the part of terrorists?

This is a grave mistake and I fear that it reflects a deep view on the part of the Prime Minister about

those within the US political system with whom he may not share a view. Prime Minister, you have said much in recent times about your experience for this job. Would an experienced Prime Minister have said something like this? Would an experienced Prime Minister have said something as irresponsible as this? Would an experienced Prime Minister have said something as reckless as this? I would say, Prime Minister, that these remarks reflect that, on these questions, you are prepared to allow partisan considerations to enter into the debate about this country's long-term national security interests. It goes to the core question of what an experienced person should and should not do if charged with the high office of Prime Minister of the Commonwealth of Australia.

This is not an idle debating point; this is now a matter for active debate right around the world. On CNN and in the US domestic body politic, Democratic congressmen and Republican congressmen are making public remarks and reacting against this Prime Minister's statement. It is not a mild, indirect, academic debating point whether this is of consequence. To stand in this parliament and say that the alternative presidential party of the United States of America is somehow within the thrall of terrorists is where this argument ultimately goes. Prime Minister, this, like your remarks last week, was a grave error of judgement.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The leader will direct his remarks through the chair.

**Mr RUDD**—This was a grave error of prime ministerial judgement when we expect something more of our Prime Minister.

Let us go also to the question of truth. In this parliament we have become used to a Prime Minister who, when he says, 'Black is white and white is black; I didn't say that but in fact I said this,' assumes it is all better by virtue of his declaration. On two occasions in the parliament today he said that he did not intend any generic critique of the Democratic Party; he said on two occasions that he was referring only to an individual. He then said it was only a reference to Senator Obama and not a generic reference to the Democratic Party. There is no way you can read this more clearly than as it is rendered in the media at present:

... I would put a circle around March 2008 and pray as many times as possible for a victory not only for Obama but also for the Democrats.

Prime Minister, you are found out in this debate for not telling the truth. I would say that, given the nature of this censure, it goes not just to your competence in dealing with the United States on these matters and the prospective alternative administration of the United States; it also goes to a core question of truth. You cannot simply stand there and after a decade or more in office—

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The leader will direct his remarks through the chair.

**Mr RUDD**—The Prime Minister has become used to standing at the dispatch box and declaring that X is Y and Y is X when we all know that is not the truth. You are caught out, Prime Minister, by the text of what you said yesterday, however you and the spin doctors may choose to represent it or misrepresent it in the general political debate of this country.

**Mr Hunt**—What would be the consequences of your policy, though?

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The member for Flinders is warned!

**Mr RUDD**—My charge around the censure motion is along these lines: it has been not an act of experience—an act of competent foreign policy—but a reckless act to make such an extraordinary statement about the alternative administration of the United States. Secondly, I charge that this Prime Minister has misled the parliament today in trying to pretend that his statement yesterday had nothing to do with a generic attack on the United States Democratic Party.

But there is another matter as well, and it goes to the consistency of this Prime Minister's parliamentary record. On an earlier occasion this Prime Minister stood at the dispatch box and, in response to a question from his own side, provided the Labor Party and the nation with a lecture about how people should behave. The lecture was along these lines:

Let me say at the outset that criticism of American policy and criticism of the policies of an American President are of course perfectly legitimate for any political leader in Australia, but it is not in our national interest to make that kind of damning, personal, generic statement of criticism of the current President of the United States.

Why not of an alternative President of the United States? He goes on to say that these attitudes were:

... driven more by tribal political considerations than ... by anything else ...

He goes on further to say:

The reality is that the Leader of the Opposition—at the time—

has allowed his tribal dislike, because of the politics of the current American President, to overwhelm his concern for the national interest. Irrespective of who the president may be, it is never in the interests of this country to have that kind of generic criticism made.

I repeat—out of the Prime Minister's mouth—this statement:

... it is never in the interests of this country to have that kind of generic criticism made.

Well, Prime Minister, when you say—

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. I have repeatedly reminded the Leader of the Opposition that the standing orders

are quite clear that he must direct his remarks through the chair.

**Mr RUDD**—When the Prime Minister repeatedly says—and he said it in his statement yesterday, which he has reaffirmed on a number of occasions today—that his attack on the policies concerning Iraq applies not just to Senator Obama but to the Democratic Party as a whole, that is by definition a generic attack. It is a generic attack on the alternative administration of the United States, in terms of the White House, and it is a generic attack on the party which currently controls the United States House and the Senate. Yet this Prime Minister stood at the dispatch box three years ago and provided the opposition with a lecture in which he said:

... it is never in the interests of this country to have that kind of generic criticism made.

Prime Minister, let us reflect on how these things have been deliberated upon in the councils of the Democratic Party today. It is not just Senator Obama who will be a candidate for the next presidential election through the US Democratic Party primaries; there is also Senator Clinton and Senator Edwards. All these individuals have different policies on Iraq. We may agree or disagree with elements of them. We do not know who ultimately will be the Democratic Party's candidate for President of the United States—the most important and powerful office in the world—but we do know this: there will be one Democratic Party candidate. The designation which will be attached to that candidate's name when American citizens go to their ballot boxes will be 'Democratic Party'. The Prime Minister of Australia has said, effectively, that that Democratic Party—the great party of American politics; the party which led America during the Second World War; the party with which John Curtin formed an alliance in 1941—is the preferred party of terrorists. That is what this Prime Minister has said.

Given that the Prime Minister's remarks were made only 24 hours or so ago, the reaction that we have had from the United States overnight is quite extraordinary. Democratic Party Senator Ron Wyden said:

The most charitable thing you can say about Mr Howard's comment is bizarre. We'll make our own judgments in this country with respect to elections and Barack Obama is a terrific public servant.

But, lest it be assumed that we are making some partisan recourse to a Democratic Party critique of this Prime Minister's foreign policy pronouncements, let us also see what leading Republicans have said. Texas Republican—Texas is known to be a very conservative state—Senator John Cornyn said:

I would prefer that Mr Howard stay out of our domestic politics and we will stay out of his domestic politics.

We now have comments of that type, calibre and content ricocheting around the US body politic, and the Prime Minister assumes that this is just a trifling mat-

ter—that it does not have an effect. Prime Minister, the Congressional Liaison Office at our embassy in Washington—the Prime Minister is aware of its operations as much as I am; it has to deal on a day-to-day basis with members of the House and members of the Senate—will have to deal with these individuals as well. Those people will now have this obstacle to confront as they go through the door to lobby on behalf of Australian farm interests—represented by the National Party from time to time—and to represent other key elements of the Australian economy; they will now have this threshold problem to deal with: ‘You’re from the country whose Prime Minister says that our party is the preferred choice of terrorists.’

Prime Minister, that presents an operational obstacle to our men and women in the field. I do not understand how you can remain stubborn and stand by those statements simply to preserve your own political reputation. The national interest demands that the Prime Minister account to the parliament properly and use this forum which the nation gives us to set the record straight. If the Prime Minister did not mean that, he should stand at the dispatch box and say, ‘Your Prime Minister got it wrong.’ A week ago the Prime Minister did this on the question of climate change. The parliament’s challenge to the Prime Minister today is to do the same when it comes to Iraq. If, a week ago, the Prime Minister could marshal the courage to come in here and say he got it wrong on climate change, the challenge for the Prime Minister today is to do the same on Iraq.

When we look at the future and at how Iraq is going to unfold in the period ahead, one thing is for certain: our alliance with the United States is critical. It is no secret that we on this side of the House voted against the Iraq war. We did so proudly, having considered the arguments which were put by the government and the administration at the time. The decision taken at that stage was absolutely right. It was voted on by every member of this House. We, the Labor Party, voted to a woman and a man against it. Those on the government side voted for it. Four years down the track, let us think about where this war has got us. The Prime Minister has invested \$2 billion of Australian taxpayers’ money in this war. This war has become the greatest single foreign policy and national security policy disaster that our country has seen since Vietnam.

This Prime Minister said that our troops would be in Iraq for a matter of months. That was four years ago. This Prime Minister said that the purpose of the Iraq war was to reduce the global terrorist threat. It has done the reverse. This Prime Minister said that we had to go to war to eliminate Iraqi chemical and biological weapons. What turned out to be the case was that there were no such weapons. The Prime Minister’s debating point is that those on this side of the House took the

Prime Minister at his word. Prime Minister, here is the difference: we on this side did not believe there was a sufficiently strong case to go to war. You on that side took that decision. That is the difference. This is a hollow debating point about the evidentiary basis at the time, because there were still ultimately concerns about the possibility of other diplomatic opportunities through the United Nations, through Hans Blix, to get to the final truth of this matter. We said, ‘We don’t think you should go to war.’

Prime Minister, you took the country to war—that is what it ended up being—and all these years down the track, four years down the track, there is not even the faintest evidence of anything approaching an exit strategy. Against every measure and standard which this government has set for success in Iraq—within months, not years; ensuring that terrorism would be reduced, not increased; eliminating weapons of mass destruction which did not exist—it has been a rolled gold, first-class foreign policy failure. Despite all of that, the Prime Minister stood before the nation yesterday and provided a public lecture to the American body politic about how this war should be conducted. Prime Minister, it is time that some members of the government began to hang their heads in shame because this war has been nothing short of a public policy disgrace.

One other thing which is always left out of this debate on Iraq is the other argument used post facto, by the foreign minister and others, that this was a war to liberate an oppressed people. Prime Minister, I am not quite sure how we justify selling that message to the 60,000-plus Iraqi civilians who now lie dead from the war. The number itself is open to dispute: is it 60,000 or, as the British *Lancet* journal said, up to 600,000? There is a huge debate about the civilian carnage which has been wreaked upon that country. In the first months of this war, when the carnage was at its height, this government, through this Prime Minister, became one of the operating and controlling powers within Iraq responsible for the continuing protection of the civilian population. Against all those measures, this war is a rolled gold disaster.

The alliance which is the subject of our debate today has survived since 1941. We in the Labor Party are proud of this alliance because we formed it. This alliance has survived and prospered under 13 prime ministers—Labor and Liberal. It has survived under 12 US presidents—Republican and Democrat. It has survived and prospered because we have all chosen to refrain from the worst forms of partisan comment of the type that we saw from the Prime Minister yesterday. When it comes to the future of this alliance, my challenge to you, Prime Minister, is that you make sure your personal relationship with the President of the United States does not get to a stage where it interferes with

the future operation of the alliance. Prime Minister, you stand censured. (*Time expired*)

**The SPEAKER**—Is the motion of censure seconded?

**Mr McClelland**—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

**Mr HOWARD** (Bennelong—Prime Minister) (3.17 pm)—Above everything else, this is a debate about the crucial importance and strength of the alliance between Australia and the United States. I am entitled, at the beginning of this debate, to put that front and centre of what I am about to say. I hope that, out of this debate, we can make a proper judgement as to which side of politics is better able to maintain the real strength of the alliance.

I do not argue for a moment that the American-Australian alliance is something that has transcended the political divide. It is true that Curtin made a famous declaration in World War II about looking to the United States and it is true that the President at that particular time was the Democrat Franklin Roosevelt. It is also true that the ANZUS alliance, which is the legal foundation of the alliance, was forged by the Menzies government during the presidency of Harry Truman. The treaty was signed in 1951. It is true that the Hawke government cooperated well with the Reagan administration across the political divide. It is true that I cooperated well with the Clinton administration, and I remind the House again that the very first occasion on which this country committed combat troops to the Iraq theatre was in response not to a request from the Bush Republican administration but to a request from the Democrat administration of Bill Clinton. There is no argument that across the political divide there has been cooperation to keep the alliance going, and I hope that will always remain the case in the future.

I reject at the very beginning the argument not only implicit but explicit in what the Leader of the Opposition said: that our side of politics cannot cooperate with the Democrats. I reject the allegation that the remarks I made yesterday—and this is plain from their context—were a generic attack on the American Democrats. As the Leader of the Opposition himself said, there is a great range of views on Iraq inside the Democratic party and amongst their supporters in Congress. For example, Joe Lieberman, a man of very great principle, who had his Democrat preselection wrenched away from him by the anti-Iraq Democrats, was successful in winning re-election to the American Senate.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**Mr HOWARD**—He did win re-election to the American Senate.

**Mr Albanese**—What's that got to do with it?

**Mr HOWARD**—It has got a hell of a lot to do with it! It illustrates the range of views within the Democ-

ratic Party on the issue of Iraq—and Senator Clinton is, of course, on the record as having voted in favour of the military operation against Iraq.

Before I come to what I said yesterday and the implications of the Leader of the Opposition's censure motion, can I take up the Leader of the Opposition on the remarks he made towards the end of his speech about the scepticism he shared about what we said about Saddam Hussein three years ago. He would have us believe that he was highly sceptical, that he was not satisfied that the evidence we presented three years ago was strong enough. Let me remind you of what he said on the *Sunrise* program on 9 September 2002:

I've said repeatedly that there is a significant threat of weapons of mass destruction from Iraq.

On *Sunrise* again, on 16 September, he said:

No one disputes that Saddam Hussein is in violation of a range of UN Security Council resolutions. He is to be condemned utterly for that ...

And in the most remarkable statement of all—and I ask the House to listen to this carefully because it goes to the credibility of what he said a few moments ago—he said:

Saddam Hussein possesses weapons of mass destruction—

He said that in his normal, unequivocal, unconditional fashion. He then ratchets it up even more:

This is a matter of empirical fact.

It is not a suspicion or a hunch; it is an 'empirical fact'. He then goes on:

If you don't believe the intelligence assessments—

and he was hinting a moment ago that he did not—

you simply read the most recent bulletins from the Federation of American Scientists, which list Iraq among the number of states in possession of chemical ... biological weapons and with the capacity to develop a nuclear program.

Laurie Oakes asked, on 16 February 2003:

OAKES: But you know that Saddam Hussein does have chemical and biological weapons?

RUDD: Absolutely, that's always been part of our official position on Iraq.

On *Sunrise* again Mr Rudd said:

... we've said from the beginning that Saddam Hussein does possess weapons of mass destruction.

Then on *Meet the Press* two weeks later he said:

Biological weapons is right in the middle of the sandwich when it comes to the critique currently, legitimate critique, of the Iraqi regime.

And so the list goes on. The Leader of the Opposition was front and centre three years ago in believing that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, yet a moment ago he came into the House and said that he was always sceptical of that. The truth is that three years ago the only real division between the Leader of the Opposition and me in a formal sense—we both

agreed that Saddam ought to go, we both agreed that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, because that was the available evidence—was that he wanted us to get yet another United Nations resolution, which it was obvious that the Security Council was not going to give us. That was the only real difference three years ago.

But let me return to the other charges that have been made by the Leader of the Opposition. The fundamental one is that he believes that what I have done has been damaging to the alliance between Australia and the United States. Let me put it to him, as calmly as one can in the context of this sort of debate: what is America's most difficult diplomatic and foreign policy issue at the present time? It is undeniably Iraq. Whether you were for the war or against the war, as things have transpired that is undeniably America's most difficult foreign policy position. Is it in the interests of the West, is it in the interests of Australia, is it in the interests of the security of our country, that America be defeated in Iraq? I ask anybody who sits opposite: do they really believe that it is in the interests of this nation that America should leave Iraq in circumstances of defeat? I ask any of the doubters out there in the Australian community, and I know there are many doubters about the policy I have pursued: is it in Australia's interests that our great ally, the greatest and most powerful nation the world has ever seen—and still, for all the criticism that is made of her, a beacon for democracy and openness around the world—be defeated in Iraq? Will that do other than bring about an enormous resurgence of morale amongst terrorists around the world? The answer to that is undeniably, unarguably, that it would be very much against the interests of the West and very much against the interests of Australia.

What does America need in this hour of pressure and trial and need? You may say, 'Why is it that a country as powerful as that should be under pressure and be under trial and be in need?' That is the reality of the world. I think she needs some loyalty and some understanding from her closest friends. She does not want a country and a friend that will leave her in the lurch. And they are the words of the Leader of the Opposition. He will not do it immediately. He will try and pretend that it is not happening. I would say the greatest current threat to the quality of the alliance would be a sense in the United States that Australia had deserted her in her hour of need. That, I believe, will do more damage potentially to the alliance than anything I might say about a single aspirant for the Democrat nomination.

I do not apologise for criticising Senator Obama's observations, because I thought what he said was wrong, just as those who sit opposite reserve the right to criticise Republican presidents. The Leader of the

Opposition kept quoting again and again something that I said three years ago. The truth is that three years ago the Leader of the Opposition defended the right of Mark Latham to say what he said about George Bush. He did not criticise him. He pretended yesterday that he privately spoke to him: 'I said to Latham—' We can just imagine! The truth is that he did not say anything of the kind. He defended Latham. He said Latham was right to do it. That was only the half of it.

The member for Fremantle quoted something from a *Guardian* editorial—you can imagine what it said—which said that the United States under George Bush had torn up more international treaties and defied more international conventions than the rest of the world put together over the last 20 years. The truth is that the Leader of the Opposition has double standards on this issue. When it came to a generic attack on the character of the President of the United States, Mark Latham did not stand up and say, 'I think Bush's policy on Iraq is wrong'—I mean, he did say that, but what really drew the attention of people was his remark that he was the most dangerous and incompetent President of the United States in living memory.

According to the Leader of the Opposition, that was an exercise in robust free speech. That is apparently all right. But when I say that I think a policy espoused by an aspirant to the Democrat nomination for the presidency of the United States is against our country's interests and I also think that it gives aid and comfort to terrorists then I am the worst in the world, I am endangering the alliance, I am bringing the nation into disrepute. It is a monumental example of double standards.

**Mr Sawford**—Say the 'Obama' word!

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The member for Port Adelaide.

**Mr HOWARD**—The Leader of the Opposition did rightly say that in this world of instant communications what we say is immediately played on television and it ricochets around the world. That is my very point about a remark being made by an aspirant for the nomination.

**Mr Sawford**—Give us his name!

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Port Adelaide is warned!

**Mr HOWARD**—If you stand up and say your policy is to bring about a withdrawal of all combat units by March 2008, that is noted by terrorist leaders. It is a source of encouragement and comfort, and we have got to be realistic about it. Bill Hayden once said, 'Words are bullets.' And in this particular operation, words spoken by presidential aspirants are, in diplomatic terms, bullets. They do send a signal. They do say to those who think that if they hold out long enough they will defeat the United States that there is real hope that that is going to occur. That is what I said and that is what I had in mind when I made those remarks about

Senator Obama. I have no intention of retracting those remarks because I believe they go very much to the national interests of this country.

In the time that I have been Prime Minister, which is now approaching 11 years, I have had the privilege of working with both a Democrat President, in Bill Clinton, and a Republican President, in George Bush. We have agreed on many things in relation to both men. The policy that we pursued in relation to Iraq in 1998 when we sent the SAS to the Middle East in response to a request from Clinton represented an example of the two countries working together in close partnership. We have worked together in very close partnership with the Bush administration ever since President Bush was elected in 2000. We have criticised both administrations. We attacked the Clinton administration's neglect of Australia's farm interests over the lamb issue, where I believed the decisions taken by the Clinton administration were unfair and quite hurtful to Australian interests. And when the Republican administration arbitrarily and carelessly imposed tariff quotas in relation to steel on the exports of many countries we were amongst the first to complain, and in 48 hours we secured a dramatic reversal of that decision taken by the Bush administration.

Yes, I have supported the Bush administration on Iraq for the reason that I have outlined. Yes, I believe that for us to pull out of Iraq now would be to hurt an ally at a time of great need for that ally; therefore I am not prepared to do that because I believe that when the going is tough it imposes a greater obligation on you to stand loyally by your allies and friends. The Leader of the Opposition may imagine that if he becomes Prime Minister he can ring up the President and say to him, 'Look, George, I'm going to pull these troops out within a little while,' and that the President will say, 'Okay'—he is a courteous man—and he will accept it. But do you think that will leave the alliance unaffected? Does anybody imagine at the present time that it will do other than great diplomatic and psychological damage to the American position in Iraq and to America's fight against terrorism for us to do that? I believe it will. That is why I believe overwhelmingly the interests of the alliance are better served by our side of politics.

**Mr McCLELLAND** (Barton) (3.32 pm)—I support the censure motion. The Prime Minister correctly said that the most difficult foreign policy issue facing the United States of America is Iraq. Certainly, since the Vietnam War, that has to be the case. In that context, how more inappropriate is the Prime Minister's attack on Mr Obama, a candidate for President of the United States, and, on his own words, an attack on the Democrat Party itself as it works through these very significant issues facing the people of the United States and, in particular, the young men and women serving that

country who are putting their lives literally on the line in Iraq.

The Prime Minister said the subject matter of the alliance was what we had to protect and that that subject matter required loyalty and understanding. But that begs the question—and this is constantly the Prime Minister's error—as to what is the subject matter of that alliance. The alliance between Australia and the United States of America is not a personal relationship between two men; it is an enduring relationship between the peoples of both countries. The Prime Minister's attack on Mr Obama and, on his own words, on the Democrats is clearly an affront to a substantial portion—most probably the majority—of the people of the United States of America. That cannot be in Australia's national interests, particularly in the circumstances where they are trying to work through a resolution to what Republican Senator McCain has described as the 'train wreck' which is Iraq.

The alliance has been so strong because it has been sustained and, indeed, grown throughout successive administrations, whether they be Labor or Liberal in Australia, Republican or Democrat in the United States. As the Leader of the Opposition said, that has involved 13 Australian prime ministers and 12 presidents of the United States. In that context, Democrat Senator Ron Wyden said that the Prime Minister's comments were bizarre and there has been quite sensible advice from a Republican, Senator John Cornyn, who basically said: 'Stay out of our affairs; we'll stay out of yours.' He considered the Prime Minister's intervention singularly unhelpful as his country tries to resolve what has been described by a Republican as the train wreck, the disaster, which is Iraq—and there is no question it is all of that.

There are estimates of between 60,000 to 450,000 civilians killed in Iraq. It is clear that some 1.3 million people are displaced within Iraq as a result of the most horrid sectarian violence. There are probably about 1.8 million people who have been made refugees from their own country as a result of the invasion of Iraq. The United States of America has spent something like \$375 billion to date—funded substantially, I might say, by bonds held by Asian countries, making the economy of the United States and hence the international economy beholden to the holders of those bonds—and it is spending at the rate \$US6 billion a month, which is in the order of \$A2 billion per week. Quite frankly, the United States economy cannot sustain that sort of commitment, and the international economy will inevitably suffer the consequences of that burden that is being placed on the United States economy.

The greater sacrifice—and this is precisely why we have no right to interfere in this very important debate that is taking place in the United States—is the fact that now over 3,000 young Americans have been killed in

Iraq. They are men and women whose bravery, commitment and dedication—that is obvious—we acknowledge in no uncertain terms. And some 20,000 young Americans—more than would fill a local suburban sports stadium—have been maimed fighting in this conflict. For the Australian Prime Minister to seek to intervene in those circumstances is, quite frankly, offensive.

From the point of view of national interest, how are Democrat members of the congress supposed to regard Australia? Firstly, they are undertaking any number of inquiries into the Australian Wheat Board fiasco. I think they will be coming after some government members, but that is a side issue. In the interests of their nation and our nation they have to consider a number of pieces of legislation that will directly impact on Australia, including those which impact through the free trade agreement, most notably, as referred to by the Leader of the Opposition, the Farm Bill. The Democrats hold the majority in the congress at the moment. That is not why you should necessarily be beholden or not be beholden to Democrat members of congress; it simply underlines how unwise and irresponsible it was for our Prime Minister to seek to intervene in the internal affairs of the United States of America. Indeed, we have been monitoring public comment in the United States as a result of the Prime Minister's intervention, and it is being dismissed by congressmen and senators alike and, indeed, the response of call-back commentators has been, 'Well, we have always known that Prime Minister Howard is a mate of George Bush.'

The trouble with that is that it narrows the alliance to being an alliance, and perceived to be an alliance, between two men rather than what it is, an alliance between the people of both nations—an enduring alliance. But the Prime Minister has justified his intervention on the basis of, on the one hand, mateship and, secondly, his analysis as to what will enliven terrorism around the world. I will address both of those issues.

It is the case that Australians have a culture of standing by a mate in a fight—and moments have occurred that I am not proud of; perhaps my nose is not as straight as it otherwise should be because of that. John Williamson in his famous song *True Blue* includes the line:

Is it standing by your mate

When he's in a fight?

But Australians are also people of common sense: if your mate is copping a hiding or being used up you will tell them the reality, you will tell them the truth. You will not give blind loyalty to a mate who is in strife. And this is where our Prime Minister has not been the friend the President of the United States needs and certainly not the friend the people of the United States need. He has not spoken the reality.

The reality, quite frankly, of his criticism of Mr Obama and Mr Obama's bill is that Mr Obama's statements and the bill essentially reflect the recommendations of the Baker-Hamilton Iraq Study Group. After that report was handed down the Prime Minister said words to the effect that the views of that study group had much to commend them and were worth considering. He has now turned from that point of view to undertaking a personal attack, we say, on the Democrats; he says on Mr Obama. Indeed, he says Mr Obama is the candidate of choice for al-Qaeda. The reality is that the recommendations of the Iraq Study Group were based on the realisation that, quite frankly, the al-Maliki government in Iraq is not stepping up to the plate. The Iraq Study Group in fact doubted whether Prime Minister al-Maliki had the ability or the willingness to take on some of the sectarian militias because at least one of them provided him with a support base.

In fact, the national security assessment that the Prime Minister referred to did not and should not be represented by the Prime Minister as commenting on either the plan of phased withdrawal as recommended by the Baker-Hamilton report or the escalation of the additional 21,000 troops committed by President Bush. What it did say was that Iraqi leaders will be hard-pressed to achieve sustained political reconciliation in the time frame of this estimate. I will go through why that is the case. If you are going to look at common-sense strategies, which, we suggest, have been part of the Baker-Hamilton recommendations, you should not go past the comments of generals on the ground. In that context, in January of this year the then Commander in Chief of the Armed Forces in Iraq, General Casey, said this:

The longer we in the U.S. forces continue to bear the main burden of Iraq security, it lengthens the time that the government of Iraq has to make hard decisions about reconciliation and dealing with the militias. And the other thing is that they can continue to blame us for all Iraq's problems, which are at base their problems.

That is, quite frankly, the reality. The White House national security adviser cautioned about the intervention by the office of the Prime Minister of Iraq to stop military action against Shia targets and encourage them against Sunni ones. He cautioned about the removal of Iraq's most effective commanders on sectarian bases and efforts to ensure Shia majority in all other ministries.

The Iraq Study Group, as I have mentioned, cautioned about the links between the Iraqi Prime Minister and militias, and the Department of Defence in August last year gave a damning assessment of the competence of the al-Maliki administration. To extract some of those main points, they said that some Iraqi politicians 'are condoning or maintaining support for violent means as a source of political leverage'. They also said that an increasing number of death squads, to use their

language, including those formed from 'rogue elements of the Iraqi security forces' prevailed in the country. They spoke of corruption in ministries hampering their capabilities, with experienced or talented employees being purged and replaced with party elements or cronies. Indeed, they very much emphasised that the Iraqi government had a long way to go to get its house in order.

The logic in those circumstances of giving an open-ended, unconditional, open cheque-book commitment to a regime which has shown an inability and, indeed, an unwillingness to get its house in order stands for all to see. That is why the Iraq Study Group in its Baker-Hamilton report recommended a phased withdrawal of American troops in order to put pressure on the Iraqi administration to step up to the plate and accept responsibility for their own security. Obviously you can have a different point of view about these issues. Obviously you are entitled to voice those points of view if you are a national leader. But what you are not entitled to do is engage in personal attack and intervene in the internal politics of the American people when they are trying to resolve these issues.

I also want to address in conclusion a couple of other points made by the Prime Minister in saying that the Leader of the Opposition—and I should be included in that along with others and, indeed, our own researchers—noted the advice that we had received that there was evidence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Where we differed and why we opposed the intervention in Iraq was that there was not the urgency present. It was significant because part of the legal basis for the intervention in Iraq was that pre-emption was predicated on a situation of urgency. At no stage did we say that the threat of imminent attack had been established. We spoke out and voted in opposition to the war because the United Nations had not been allowed to undertake their investigation—again, in accordance with the international rule of law. There is no question that the invasion of Iraq was contrary to the international rule of law. The international community does not have ownership of it as a result of that fact. There is no question that Iraq is a train wreck. There is no question that an open-ended, open cheque-book and unconditional commitment to an administration that is using a United States—(*Time expired*)

**Dr NELSON** (Bradfield—Minister for Defence) (3.47 pm)—Firstly, in strongly defending the Prime Minister's position on this issue, I think that it is worth remembering that there are three principal elements to this debate. The first is the alliance between Australia and the United States. The second is the role of al-Qaeda and other global terrorist networks not only in Iraq but in the region and throughout the world. The third issue is the role of Australia's Prime Minister in protecting and defending Australia's interests not only

here and in our region but, indeed, throughout the world.

On the alliance, no Australian should forget that in 1942, when bombs were landing in Darwin and Townsville and Australian soldiers were engaged in a gripping struggle on the Kokoda Track and repelling the Japanese at Milne Bay and Isurava, the Americans were in the Coral Sea and Guadalcanal and they lost many lives. Australia today is a free country for many reasons, but one of them is that United States fought the war in the Pacific. This government, and I am sure also the opposition, does not forget that. That is why the formalisation of that alliance in 1951 is so important to the defence and security architecture not only of Australia but also of our region and, indeed, the mutual elements of that alliance as they are executed throughout the world today.

The second thing is the point about al-Qaeda. In relation to the stated position of one of the presidential candidates in the United States, Senator Obama, regarding a specific withdrawal date, which we understand does not relate to conditions on the ground in Iraq, the Prime Minister said yesterday that al-Qaeda would be putting a circle around that date and with some enthusiasm would certainly be supporting that kind of policy outcome in the United States and, I am sure, in other countries that are involved in Iraq.

It is important, when the heat is taken out of this debate, for us as Australians to understand what we are facing. It is worth remembering that in 1993 there was a bombing at the World Trade Centre. Six people were dead and 1,000 were injured. A number of other terrorist events, principally but not only against US interests, occurred over the subsequent three years. We then had the Kenya bombing of the US embassy by al-Qaeda with nearly 300 dead and 5,000 injured. Then in 1998, the same year, the Tanzanian US embassy was bombed and there were 10 dead and 77 injured. Again, al-Qaeda was responsible.

In 2000 the USS *Cole* was attacked by al-Qaeda with 17 dead and 39 injured. And then, of course, on September 11, more than 3,000 people, mainly but not only Americans—there were also Australians—were killed in the al-Qaeda inspired and executed bombing of the World Trade Centre and the attack on the Pentagon. Anyone who has seen the film *Flight 93* will get just a glimpse of the terror that was inflicted upon the people on that aircraft. We then had a parade bombing in 2002 in Russia—which is rather ironic given the comments of President Putin in the last 24 hours. Again there were casualties: 150 wounded and 42 dead. We then saw some 88 Australians murdered in Bali in 2002. Al-Qaeda claimed responsibility for that. Samudra, Hambali, Muklas and others had trained with al-Qaeda in Afghanistan. Then, of course, we had an attack on Israeli tourists in Kenya.



The fact is our generation and my children's generation faces something that is no less a threat to our way of life, our security and our values than the one we faced in 1942. It is harder to see, but it is ubiquitous, which means that it is all over the place. It is throughout the world. And, as we know from some of the cases being conducted in Australian courts, sadly we have some people in our own country that subscribe to this way of thinking.

The fact is that we are facing something that is really a global insurgency. We are dealing with disparate principally Islamist groups who have hijacked the name of Islam to build a violent political utopia. Al-Qaeda, to whom the Prime Minister referred—one of the many reasons, I might add, why the United States government has just increased its troop numbers in Iraq—is an organisation that is fundamentally and fanatically opposed to not only the United States but also the United Kingdom, Australia and similar countries throughout the world, whether they be Judaeo-Christian, Jewish or indeed Muslim countries—countries that are open to other human beings, to other ideas. They have an attitude about the treatment of women which is incompatible with a peaceful world, let alone a civil society. One of the reasons why al-Qaeda, for example, has been targeting teachers in Baghdad, particularly at the Baghdad university, is that they are educating women. They are also people who are fundamentally and fanatically opposed to people who have a different religious affiliation or point of view from their own. That is what we are dealing with.

In this day and age, in the year 2007, the thinking world, Australia in particular, needs strong leadership. We need moral musculature. We need the capacity to stand up to these people. We need a leadership and a vision that make Australians understand that ensuring the security of our country, and our interests, our values and our people, is not confined to our borders and our region—to prevent failing states in our region. Australians also need to understand that throughout South-East Asia, Asia and indeed the Middle East we face a common enemy.

It is also important to appreciate that we did criticise the United States for what was described by the *Daily Telegraph* in Sydney as 'the great lamb betrayal'. We survived the Whitlam years, and the US-Australia alliance survived that as well. We have survived many other things, and the alliance has grown and, in my opinion, it has never been stronger than it is today.

But it is worth remembering that we are in Iraq today because the world believed—as the Leader of the Opposition knew and said—that Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction. That was in a post September 11 world, after more than 3,000 people had been killed, murdered, in New York and Washington. The world knew he had weapons of mass destruction,

but what could not be established beyond any doubt, because he would not allow the United Nations to go in and have a look, was whether he still had those weapons of mass destruction that could then be passed on to terrorist organisations such as al-Qaeda. We made the decision that the world was better off without Saddam Hussein. With all of the carnage and the bloodshed and the sacrifice that we see in Iraq on a day-to-day basis—principally in four of the 18 provinces of Iraq, I might add—no-one should forget that, before the United States, Britain, Australia and almost 30 other countries decided to free the Iraqi people, Saddam Hussein was responsible for the deaths of, on average, 70,000 people a year for 15 years. That is 200 a day. That was centralised killing—government-sanctioned centralised killing by Saddam Hussein.

It is also important that Australians recognise that we have a responsibility to Australia and Australians to see that we go to the heart of terrorist activity in the Middle East and also, of course, in Afghanistan. We also believed it was important, when the United Kingdom and the United States—our key allies, who have fought so hard to see that we are free—said to us that they believed Australia had a responsibility to be part of this, that we stepped up to the plate and said, 'Yes, we most certainly will.'

The problem is that if we take the easy approach, if we take the approach that the Leader of the Opposition and the shadow spokesman for foreign affairs just articulated, we will leave our children hostage to forces they may never control. We will also diminish ourselves and demean the values for which that alliance has stood and for which our country has stood in its relatively short history. Never let it be said that my children will look back and say of John Howard and the Howard government: why did they not stand up to al-Qaeda and other global terrorist networks when they had the opportunity and the responsibility to do so? That is what a premature withdrawal from Iraq is really all about. And it ought to be remembered that we are in Iraq, the United States are in Iraq and the United Kingdom are in Iraq at the request of the democratically elected Iraqi government, as endorsed by the United Nations. The media over the past week, particularly in the American press, has actually been for the Iraqis to request that the Baghdad security plan be implemented more quickly. This is hard going, but, as any Australian well knows, when the going gets tough the tough get going.

The member for Barton reminded us of John Williamson's song 'True Blue'. I would remind him of Beccy Cole, who just won an award in Tamworth for her song 'Poster Girl'. She said late last year:

My Australia is a country of fiercely loyal buggers who stand by their mates and who won't back down from their beliefs.

We are never going to take the view that the defence and protection of Australia in the modern world, in the 21st century, is solely about the 500 Defence personnel on our borders and about support and protection and assistance to countries in our immediate region. What happens in Iraq and Afghanistan has everything to do with Australia and Australian interests. Sadly, the cruellest price has already been paid by almost 100 Australians in Bali and in other parts of the world. It is also important to remember that isolationism will never make us safer. The biggest threat that the United States strategic policy represents to not only Australia but the rest of the world is not military adventurism. It is isolationism.

When the Prime Minister of Australia stands up and criticises a presidential candidate for election in the United States for setting a specific date for the withdrawal of American troops from Iraq, our Prime Minister has a responsibility to stand up and protect the interests of Australia. If al-Qaeda prevails in Iraq, we will most certainly leave the Iraqi people—12 million of whom showed enormous courage to vote—at their mercy. Many Australians grizzle and groan about having to go and vote every three or four years, whereas 12 million Iraqis risked their lives to say, ‘We believe in what the United States, Britain, Australia and the thinking world wants to help us achieve.’

We will also leave those Iraqi people at the mercy of the sectarian death squads of al-Qaeda. We know from al-Zarqawi’s letter to Osama bin Laden in January 2004 that al-Qaeda’s entire strategy in Iraq was to foment sectarian violence. It planned the al-Askari shrine bombing in Samarra in January last year to make sure that the Shia would start to respond to a litany of attacks against Shia interests so that there would be a sectarian war. Since when has it ever been the Australian way to say in response to that, ‘Ah, well, we’re out of it; we’ll just look after ourselves’? Since when has it been the Australian way to say to the United States of America, ‘We’re dropping our bundle; you can go and lift it for us’? It is delusional to say that only the US, Britain and these countries can take up the war against al-Qaeda and these global terrorist networks.

It is extremely important to appreciate that the Leader of the Opposition has chosen to criticise and attack the Prime Minister of Australia for standing up for Australian interests in relation to what is being said in the United States because the position presented by Senator Obama is precisely the position I suspect we are about to get from the Leader of the Opposition. In other words, he will not have the guts to go through the year 2007 declaring any real position, but as soon as he gets to the other side of the election—God forbid if he were to become the Prime Minister of Australia—he will suddenly do the thing that Australia has never done and simply say to our mate, our ally, the United

States of America, ‘We’re leaving it all to you.’ Under no circumstances will this government or our Prime Minister expose Australia’s interests.

Question put:

That the motion (**Mr Rudd’s**) be agreed to.

The House divided. [4.06 pm]

(The Speaker—Hon. David Hawker)

Ayes.....	60
Noes.....	<u>82</u>
Majority.....	<u>22</u>

#### AYES

Adams, D.G.H.	Albanese, A.N.
Beazley, K.C.	Bevis, A.R.
Bird, S.	Bowen, C.
Burke, A.E.	Burke, A.S.
Byrne, A.M.	Corcoran, A.K.
Crean, S.F.	Danby, M. *
Edwards, G.J.	Elliot, J.
Ellis, A.L.	Ellis, K.
Emerson, C.A.	Ferguson, L.D.T.
Ferguson, M.J.	Fitzgibbon, J.A.
Garrett, P.	Georganas, S.
George, J.	Gibbons, S.W.
Gillard, J.E.	Grierson, S.J.
Griffin, A.P.	Hall, J.G. *
Hatton, M.J.	Hayes, C.P.
Hoare, K.J.	Irwin, J.
Jenkins, H.A.	Kerr, D.J.C.
King, C.F.	Lawrence, C.M.
Livermore, K.F.	Macklin, J.L.
McClelland, R.B.	McMullan, R.F.
Melham, D.	Murphy, J.P.
O’Connor, B.P.	O’Connor, G.M.
Owens, J.	Plibersek, T.
Price, L.R.S.	Quick, H.V.
Ripoll, B.F.	Roxon, N.L.
Rudd, K.M.	Sawford, R.W.
Sercombe, R.C.G.	Smith, S.F.
Snowdon, W.E.	Swan, W.M.
Tanner, L.	Thomson, K.J.
Vamvakinou, M.	Wilkie, K.

#### NOES

Abbott, A.J.	Anderson, J.D.
Andrews, K.J.	Bailey, F.E.
Baird, B.G.	Baker, M.
Baldwin, R.C.	Barresi, P.A.
Bartlett, K.J.	Billson, B.F.
Bishop, B.K.	Bishop, J.I.
Broadbent, R.	Brough, M.T.
Cadman, A.G.	Causley, I.R.
Ciobo, S.M.	Costello, P.H.
Draper, P.	Dutton, P.C.
Elson, K.S.	Entsch, W.G.
Farmer, P.F.	Fawcett, D.
Ferguson, M.D.	Forrest, J.A.
Gambaro, T.	Gash, J.
Georgiou, P.	Haase, B.W.
Hardgrave, G.D.	Hartsuyker, L.
Henry, S.	Hockey, J.B.
Hull, K.E. *	Hunt, G.A.
Jensen, D.	Johnson, M.A.

Jull, D.F.	Katter, R.C.
Keenan, M.	Kelly, D.M.
Kelly, J.M.	Laming, A.
Ley, S.P.	Lindsay, P.J.
Lloyd, J.E.	Markus, L.
May, M.A.	McArthur, S. *
McGauran, P.J.	Mirabella, S.
Moylan, J.E.	Nairn, G.R.
Nelson, B.J.	Neville, P.C.
Pearce, C.J.	Prosser, G.D.
Pyne, C.	Randall, D.J.
Robb, A.	Ruddock, P.M.
Schultz, A.	Scott, B.C.
Secker, P.D.	Slipper, P.N.
Smith, A.D.H.	Somlyay, A.M.
Southcott, A.J.	Stone, S.N.
Thompson, C.P.	Ticehurst, K.V.
Tollner, D.W.	Truss, W.E.
Tuckey, C.W.	Turnbull, M.
Vaile, M.A.J.	Vale, D.S.
Vasta, R.	Wakelin, B.H.
Washer, M.J.	Wood, J.

\* denotes teller

Question negatived.

**Dr Nelson**—Mr Speaker, I ask that further questions be placed on the *Notice Paper*.

#### PERSONAL EXPLANATIONS

**Ms ROXON** (Gellibrand) (4.13 pm)—Mr Speaker, I wish to make a personal explanation.

**The SPEAKER**—Does the honourable member claim to have been misrepresented?

**Ms ROXON**—I do.

**The SPEAKER**—Please proceed.

**Ms ROXON**—On Friday, 9 February, the *Australian Financial Review* paraphrased me. The article stated that I said that it appeared for one in six PBS drugs ‘firms were preventing people from buying generic medicines’. My view has been misrepresented. The ‘one in six’ was the one in six drugs that attracts extra payments under the government’s policies.

#### QUESTIONS TO THE SPEAKER

##### Government Regulations

**Mr BEVIS** (4.13 pm)—My office has been advised by the bill and papers office staff that government regulations are no longer to be provided in print form or that the process is being phased out with the intention of government regulations being available electronically only. I ask if, as the Presiding Officer of this House, you could look at what policy has been put in place—what process was involved and what consultations occurred. I understand that they are available electronically, but there would be many members and senators, and I am sure people in the public generally, who look to those written documents to work from. The regulations are in fact important in the governance of the country. They represent the law of the land. They are important documents and, if indeed that advice is

correct and the intention is for them not to be available in hard-copy form, I think there would be a number of members who would have a concern about that. I would appreciate your advice on the matter.

**The SPEAKER**—I thank the member for Brisbane. I certainly endorse his remarks about the importance of the availability of government regulations. I will make further enquiries on the specifics of the matters he has raised and report back.

#### Questions in Writing

**Mr BEVIS**—Mr Speaker, in accordance with standing orders, could I ask you to write to the following ministers on these questions in writing: the Minister representing the Minister for Justice and Customs, on No. 4002; the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, on No. 4090; the Minister representing the Minister for Justice and Customs, on No. 4747; the Minister representing the Minister for Justice and Customs, on No. 4807; the Minister for Defence, on No. 4877; the Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry, on No. 4878; the Minister representing the Minister for Justice and Customs, on No. 4879; and, finally, the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, on No. 4947. None of these questions in writing has been replied to.

**The SPEAKER**—I thank the member for Brisbane and I will follow-up his request.

#### House of Representatives: Dress Code

**Mr EDWARDS** (4.16 pm)—Mr Speaker, I refer you to a number of initiatives that have been taken around the precincts of Parliament House that relate to the need to combat global warming and water shortages. I understand that these include, for instance, turning off a number of water fountains around the place. I also understand that the air conditioning has been turned down and that water pressure has been turned down. I think these are all initiatives which we would support.

Mr Speaker, I wonder whether you might give some consideration to another initiative: allowing members to remove their coats in the chamber during the warmer summer months. Not only do I think it would make for a more conducive work environment; it would probably set an example to boardrooms around Australia. I am suggesting that you might consider this only during the warmer months. I am not saying it should be compulsory for everyone but that members should be allowed to have the choice of whether or not to wear a coat into the chamber. I wonder whether this initiative could set an example for the rest of Australia whilst still maintaining suitable and appropriate dress standards in the parliament. It annoys me to see that some of the women in the House are doing their bit for global warming but we are not allowed to join them.

**The SPEAKER**—I thank the member for Cowan. I point out to him that, yes, there was a trial to reduce the amount of water required for air conditioning last month, but that was for a week. Since then, the temperature has been returned to the level it was at prior to that. Last week a couple of members raised with me that they felt that the chamber itself was too warm. I have made some inquiries about that. There is no evidence of it, but I am mindful of the fact that we are expected to uphold certain dress standards and, if it is too warm in the chamber, I have no problem in seeing if the temperature might be reduced. With regard to the last part of the question on dress standards, the standing orders do require that the occupier of the chair uphold proper dress standards. If it is the will of the House to change that then I would obviously take direction from the House.

### Question Time

**Mr ALBANESE** (4.18 pm)—Mr Speaker, I have a question for you concerning the conclusion of question time today. Extraordinarily, the Prime Minister chose not to vote in the censure motion against him that was moved by the Leader of the Opposition. Normally, it would be the case that question time would be called off by the Prime Minister; today that did not occur. Is it within standing orders for another minister to go to the dispatch box and call off question time, or should question time have been allowed to proceed given that the Prime Minister deemed it not worthy to vote on that censure motion?

**The SPEAKER**—I think there have been a number of occasions when I have noted that ministers other than the Prime Minister have asked for further questions to be placed on the *Notice Paper*, so I do not think there was anything particularly unusual about today's event.

### PETITIONS

**The Clerk**—Petitions have been lodged for presentation as follows and copies will be referred to the appropriate ministers:

#### Organ Harvesting

To the Honourable The Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives Assembled in Parliament:

The petition of certain citizens and residents of Australia draws to the attention of the House that:

A Canadian report released on 6 July 2006 came to the conclusion that China has been committing crimes against humanity, that the authorities have been harvesting vital organs from thousands of unwilling Falun Gong practitioners and killing them in the process. Mr David Kilgour, a former Canadian MP and Secretary of State for Asia Pacific, and international human rights lawyer Mr David Matas initiated an independent investigation into the allegations of organ harvesting from live victims.

"We have concluded that the government of China and its agencies in numerous parts of the country, in particular hos-

pitals but also detention centres and 'people's courts', since 1999 have put to death a large but unknown number of Falun Gong prisoners of conscience. Their vital organs, including hearts, kidneys, livers and corneas, were virtually simultaneously seized involuntarily for sale at high prices, sometimes to foreigners, who normally face long waits for voluntary donations of such organs in their home countries."—Pg. 44 of the report.

**YOUR PETITIONERS THEREFORE REQUEST THE HOUSE TO INITIATE A RESOLUTION TO:**

- I. Urge the CCP to unconditionally release all Falun Gong practitioners and give full access to jails, labour camps, detention centres and related hospitals for the Coalition to Investigate Persecution of Falun Gong in China (CIPFG) and/or the UN to conduct independent investigations;
- II. Establish a Senate Committee Inquiry into the allegation of Organ Harvesting;
- III. Discourage Australian citizens from travelling to China for organ transplants; and prevent companies, institutions and individuals providing goods and services and training to China's organ transplant programs until such time as it is beyond reasonable doubt that no organs used have been harvested against the will of the donor.

by **Ms Roxon** (from 225 citizens)

by **Mr Slipper** (from 97 citizens)

by **Mr Somlyay** (from 203 citizens)

#### Australia Post: Services

To the Speaker and Honourable Members assembled in the House of Representatives in Canberra. We the undersigned call on the Parliament to investigate the need for an Australia Post outlet at the Timbarra Shopping Centre in Berwick and draw to the attention of the House the growing demands of such a service due to the high levels of residential growth within the immediate vicinity of Timbarra and surrounding areas.

by **Mr Byrne** (from 678 citizens)

#### Australia Post: Services

To the Speaker and Honourable Members assembled in the House of Representatives in Canberra. We the undersigned call on the Parliament to investigate the need for an Australia Post agency at the Parkhill Shopping Centre in Berwick and draw to the attention of the House the growing demands of such a service due to the high levels of residential growth within the immediate vicinity of Timbarra and surrounding areas.

by **Mr Byrne** (from 267 citizens)

#### Human Cloning

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

This petition signed by citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House of Representatives our concerns over the legislation presently being debated re: "Prohibition of human cloning for reproduction and the regulation of human embryo research amendment" Bill 2006.

We believe that human life begins at fertilisation. To cross the line by allowing the cloning of embryos for research and stem cell production denies the embryo its' intrinsic value as

a human being. We, the undersigned, request the Members of the House of Representatives to vote NO to this Bill in order to protect the dignity of all human life and thus promote a humane, ethical and civilized Australian Society.

by **Mr Causley** (from 175 citizens)

### **Immigration: Asylum Seekers**

To the Honourable the Speaker and the Members of the House of Representatives in Parliament assembled:

Whereas the 1998 Synod of the Anglican Diocese of Melbourne carried without dissent the following motion:

‘That this Synod regrets the Government’s adoption of procedures for certain people seeking political asylum in Australia which exclude them from all public income support while withholding permission to work, thereby creating a group of beggars dependent on the Churches and charities for food and the necessities of life;

and calls upon the Federal government to review such procedures immediately and remove all practices which are manifestly inhumane and in some cases in contravention of our national obligations as a signatory of the UN Covenant on Civil and Political Rights.’

We, therefore, the individual, undersigned attendees at the Uniting Church Edithvale Victoria, petition the House of Representatives in support of the above mentioned Motion.

AND we, as in duty bound will ever pray.

by **Ms Corcoran** (from 22 citizens)

### **Medibank Private: Sale**

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament to oppose the sale of Medibank Private:

This petition of certain citizens of Australia registers its protest to the sale of Medibank Private and calls on the House to oppose the sale of Medibank Private.

by **Ms Corcoran** (from 5 citizens)

### **16th Air Defence Regiment**

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House, the massive impact that the loss of the 16th Air Defence Regiment would have on the Businesses, Schools and Sporting Clubs of our Adelaide Hills Community.

Your petitioners therefore request the House to:

Retain the 16th Air Defence Regiment at the Woodside Barracks in the Adelaide Hills.

by **Mr Downer** (from 1,916 citizens)

### **Agriculture: Food Irradiation**

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House their opposition to food irradiation and the building of the nuclear irradiation facility proposed for Narangba, in Queensland, as well as the Electron beam irradiation facility proposed for North Queensland.

Your petitioners therefore request the House to:

- Prohibit the establishment of a nuclear irradiation facility or X-Ray or Electron beam irradiation facility at any location in Australia.
- Ban the import, export and sale of irradiated food in Australia.
- Call on the Australia New Zealand Food Standards Council (ANZSC) and the Australian New Zealand Food Authority (ANZFA) to amend Standards A-17 and 1.5.3—Irradiation of Foods in the Food Standards Code to ban food irradiation outright in Australia and New Zealand.

by **Mrs Elliot** (from 225 citizens)

### **Whaling**

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in parliament:

The petition of certain residents of the State of NSW draws to the attention of the House that Japan and Norway have slaughtered more than 25,000 whales under the ‘Scientific Whaling’ program loophole in the last 25 years. Japan’s new Antarctic proposal includes Sei, Fin, Sperm and Minke Whales, the equivalent of a massive commercial slaughter. By continuing to ignore the rulings of the International Whaling Commission (IWC) Scientific Committee, Japan is setting a precedent, which other nations could follow. Legal experts say that Japan needs to be taken to the International Court of Justice for abusing its rights under the IWC Convention.

Your petitioners therefore request the House to call on the government to take Japan to the International Court of Justice on behalf of our country and other smaller countries in the South Pacific who are impacted by Japan’s slaughter.

by **Mrs Elliot** (from 25 citizens)

### **Veterans’ Carers**

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives Assembled in Parliament:

The petition of concerned citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the fact that Carers of disabled veterans take care of their veteran 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, every week of the year. For their dedicated work, these carers receive the sum of \$6.76 per day Carers’ Allowance. As a consequence of the heavy work involved in the caring process, Carers find themselves suffering physical disabilities and depression and often need similar care to that which they are giving to disabled veterans.

Your petitioners therefore request the House to:

- Administer and pay Carers’ Allowance to Carers of Veterans through the Department of Veterans’ Affairs.
- Provide a health programme for carers of Veterans to cover all aspects of their well being.
- Provide transport assistance to veteran’s Carers for their return trip home when the veteran is hospitalised and does not return with them.
- Provide relief from parking fees for Carers when visiting hospitalised veteran.
- Subsidize accommodation to enable the carers to stay nearby the veteran if their veteran is hospitalized away from their home town.

- Increase the amount of respite available to Carers of disabled veterans.
- Remove the abolition of payment of the Carer's Allowance which ceases after a period of six weeks if the Carer's veteran is required to stay in care outside of his home.

by **Mr Hockey** (from 16 citizens)

### **Human Rights: Falun Gong**

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in parliament:

The petition of certain citizens and residents of Australia draws to the attention of the House that:

Sydney resident David Liang, father of two, was shot in both feet only hours after he and eight other Australians arrived in South Africa to file a lawsuit against Chinese officials who were visiting South Africa.

This proposed lawsuit charged China's Vice President Zeng and Minister of Commerce Bo with torture, genocide and crimes against humanity, committed according to Jiang Zemin's personally stated policies regarding Falun Gong to "Ruin their reputations, bankrupt them financially and destroy them physically," as well as, "Killing them won't matter because their deaths will be counted as suicides." Zeng and Bo have been served with lawsuits during previous overseas visits for their pivotal role in prolonging the persecution of Falun Gong in China.

South African Police are investigating the incident as attempted murder against an Australian.

Australians Terrorised

Falun Gong practitioners have long been the victims of discrimination, harassment and assault from Chinese officials on Australian soil and worldwide. A known 'blacklist' has been circulated to prevent Falun Gong practitioners travelling overseas. This incident in South Africa is the most severe case to date and marks a new level of violence in the persecution of Falun Gong practitioners outside of China.

YOUR PETITIONERS THEREFORE REQUEST THE HOUSE TO:

- (1) Pay close attention to the safety of Australians, including Falun Gong practitioners, who face terrorist attacks by Jiang Zemin's faction within the Chinese Government to help prevent such terrorist activities.
- (2) Co-operate with authorities in South Africa to thoroughly investigate this incident and bring to justice those responsible for this attempted murder.
- (3) Condemn the acts of terrorism by Jiang Zemin's faction against Falun Gong practitioners both inside and outside of China.

by **Ms Plibersek** (from 22,800 citizens)

### **East Timor**

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

The petition of certain citizens of Australians draws to the attention of the House

The UN's Independent Commission of Inquiry for Timor-Leste report recommends that two escaped prisoners, Major Alfredo Reinado (ex-military leader) and Commander Vicente Railos be prosecuted as they are "reasonably sus-

pected of having committed crimes against life and the person". These two rebel leaders are still free and are not being held accountable for their alleged crimes. East Timor society remains paralyzed because armed groups, led by men such as these, remain at large.

Your petitioners therefore request the House:

To call on the Australian government to order the Australian military command within East Timor to arrest these two fugitives so that they can be brought to trial for their alleged crimes.

by **Ms Plibersek** (from 61 citizens)

### **Nuclear Waste**

Petition to the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

This petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House its objection to a nuclear reactor or high level nuclear waste dump being built in our area. Your petitioners therefore request the House to reject any nuclear reactors or high level nuclear waste dumps being built in the Wide Bay region.

by **Mr Ripoll** (from 18 citizens)

### **Whaling**

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament:

The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws to the attention of the House the Howard Government's failure to protect the whale population in Australian waters despite laws passed by the Parliament in 1999 which gave it the power to do so.

We the undersigned therefore request the House to call on the Howard Government to:

- Take all steps to prevent an increase in Japan's "scientific research" quota at the International Whaling Commission meeting to be held in the Caribbean in June 2006.
- Take all necessary legal steps to ensure Australian laws creating an Australian Whale Sanctuary in the Southern Ocean and making it an offence to kill or injure whales in Australian waters.
- Challenge the legality of Japan's abuse of the "scientific research" exemption to the ban on commercial whaling by taking a case to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea.

by **Mr Ripoll** (from 18 citizens)

### **Members and Senators: Eligibility**

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

This petition of Mr. Gabor Laszlo Horvath of 10 Lesney Street Richmond, Melbourne of the State of Victoria Electoral Division of Melbourne (Vic)

Draws to the attention of the House: On June 23, 1999 the Full Bench of the High Court of Australia ruled that the United Kingdom is now a foreign power, within the meaning of section 44(i) of the Constitution. That section declared that:

"Any person who:

(i) is under any acknowledgment of allegiance, obedience, or adherence, to a foreign power, or is a subject or a citizen or entitled to the right or privileges or a citizen of a foreign power; ...

shall be incapable of being chosen or of sitting as a senator or a member of the House of Representatives,”

On June 23, 1999 every senator and every members of the House of Representatives under Section 42 of the Constitution within the meaning of section 44(i) of the Constitution, been declared that shall be incapable of being chosen or of sitting as a senator or a member of the House of Representatives. Section 42 of the Constitution declared that:

“Oath or affirmation of allegiance

Every senator and every member of the House of Representatives shall before taking his seat make and subscribe before the Governor-General, or some person authorised by him, an oath or affirmation of allegiance in the form set forth in the schedule to this Constitution.”

In the Schedule to this Constitution. states:

“Oath

I, A.B., do swear that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her

Majesty Queen Victoria, Her heirs and successors according to law.

SO HELP ME GOD!

Affirmation

I, A.B., do solemnly and sincerely affirm and declare that I will be faithful and bear true allegiance to Her Majesty Queen Victoria, Her heirs and successors according to law.

Note: The name of the King or Queen of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland for the being it to substituted from time to time”

The Common Informers (Parliamentary Disqualifications) Act 1975 (Cth) on 23 April 1975, s3(1) and s3(2).; command a penalty for any person sitting as a senator or as a member of the House of Representatives while he was a person declared by s.44(i) and s.44(ii) of the Constitution to be incapable of so sitting.

Your petitioner request the House: To move the following motion: That this petition be referred to a committee for consideration to take necessary steps by the members to renounce their allegiance jointly to a foreign power or the validity of the upcoming election will be absolutely void! within the meaning of s.44(i) and s.44(ii) of the Constitution.

by **Mr Tanner** (from 1 citizen)

### **Workplace Relations**

To the Honourable Speaker of the House and Members of the House assembled in Parliament:

The petition of certain citizens of Australia draws the attention of the House to the fact that Australian employees are worse off as a result of the Howard Government’s changes to the industrial relations system.

The petitioners call upon the Howard Government to adopt a plan to produce a fair industrial relations system based on fairness and the fundamental principles of minimum standards, wages and conditions; safety nets; an independent umpire; the right to associate; and the right to collectively bargain.

The petitioners therefore ask the House to ensure that the Howard Government delivers:

1. Proper rights for Australian workers who are unfairly dismissed.
2. A strong safety net of minimum awards and conditions.

3. An independent umpire to ensure fair wages and conditions, and to settle disputes.
4. The right for employees to bargain collectively for decent wages and condition:
5. The right for workers to reject individual contracts which cut pay and conditions, and undermine collective bargaining and union representation.
6. The right to join a union and be represented by a union.

by **Mr Tanner** (from 10 citizens)

### **Dental Health**

To the Honourable Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives assembled in Parliament.

Draws attention of the House of the inadequacy of Dental Health Care which can lead to life threatening diseases.

Your petitioners therefore request the House that we, the undersigned, implore you to introduce a National Dental Health Scheme, as a matter of urgency, to be funded by a 1% levy of taxable income, this amount to be added on to the Medicare levy.

by **Mr Windsor** (from 184 citizens)

Petitions received.

### **PRIVATE MEMBERS’ BUSINESS**

#### **Mr David Hicks**

**Ms VAMVAKINO** (Calwell) (4.23 pm)—I move:

That the House:

- (1) acknowledges that the ongoing detention without trial of David Hicks is inconsistent with both international and Australian legal standards (including the principle of *habeas corpus*) and contravenes the individual rights and protections for which these standards provide;
- (2) acknowledges that the newly revised rules for the US Military Commissions under which David Hicks is to be tried, but under which no US citizen can or will be tried, remain in breach of both the Geneva Conventions and the Australian Criminal Code and for this reason, do not constitute a fair trial but instead set an unacceptable precedent for the detention and trial of an Australian citizen overseas, especially by sanctioning the use of hearsay evidence and evidence obtained by coercion and by not permitting the accused to be privy to all the evidence;
- (3) notes that one of the charges laid against David Hicks relies on the use of retrospective legislation, while the Government asserts that he cannot be tried in Australia because it would require retrospective legislation;
- (4) calls for the immediate repatriation of David Hicks to Australia to face trial under Australian law;
- (5) urges members of the United States Congress to help facilitate David Hicks’ repatriation to Australia by passing a resolution in Congress to this effect;
- (6) calls on the Government to release advice provided by the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions concerning the viability of charging David Hicks in Australia;
- (7) acknowledges that we in this place have a responsibility to monitor and protect the welfare and rights of Australian citizens imprisoned overseas; and for this reason:

- (8) calls for an immediate and independent assessment of the mental and physical health of David Hicks by relevant experts to ascertain the validity of allegations made concerning the deteriorating well being of David Hicks;
- (9) seeks concrete assurances that any such assessment will not jeopardise or in any way prejudice the treatment of David Hicks whilst he is in Guantanamo Bay; and
- (10) acknowledges that the ongoing imprisonment of David Hicks, and the denial of his basic rights, runs counter to the principles of freedom and democracy in the name of which the 'war against terror' is being fought, and threatens to undermine the international effort to combat terrorism.

I move this motion today because, like a growing number of Australians, I believe that the ongoing detention without trial of David Hicks is both unlawful and in serious breach of Mr Hicks's human rights. The detention without trial of David Hicks and allegations concerning his mistreatment and possible torture in Guantanamo Bay go to the very heart of why we have a body of international law that protects the rights and welfare of individuals against the misuse of power, especially when it results in injustice or inhumane treatment.

An unwavering commitment to upholding the rule of law, combined with an unwavering commitment to the individual rights provided for under humanitarian and human rights law, must provide the standard benchmark for how David Hicks is to be treated. This has not been the case, and it is for this reason that a growing chorus of opposition against David Hicks's continued detention at Guantanamo Bay now exists in Australia. This opposition is built around three fundamental concerns: firstly, public concern over reports that David Hicks's mental and physical health are deteriorating as a result of his long-term detention at Guantanamo Bay; secondly, public opposition to the way David Hicks continues to be denied his basic legal and human rights and to the way the rule of law has been subverted in the attempt to have him tried; and, thirdly, public anger over the way the Howard government has simply abandoned David Hicks and, in the process, has failed in its basic duty of care to protect the rights and welfare of an Australian citizen held in detention overseas.

To this country's great shame, the Howard government has not demanded that David Hicks be returned home to face trial in Australia, as the United Kingdom and other Western states have done, and it is the only Western government that is prepared to accept the US military commissions as a substitute for what should be a free and fair trial for David Hicks in a civilian court. The ongoing detention without trial of David Hicks is inconsistent with both international and Australian legal standards, including the principle of habeas corpus. Rather than admit to this, the Howard government has instead sought to denigrate and dismiss those who

speak out against the mistreatment of David Hicks and who seek to defend his basic legal right to receive a fair trial by accusing them of not taking the threat of terrorism seriously.

My response is simply this: any war which relies on suspending individual rights and the rule of law in the name of combating terrorism comes perilously close to eroding the very democracy and freedoms that it purports to defend. History teaches us that the interests of freedom and democracy are never served by temporarily suspending or deferring them. Rather, these interests can only be served by rigorously adhering to the basic legal and human rights that freedom and democracy provide for us. I want to refer to the distinguished writer Arthur Koestler, who reminds us in his book *Darkness at Noon* that the end never justifies the means.

The newly revised rules for the military commissions under which David Hicks is to be tried, but under which no US citizen can or will be tried, remain in breach both of the Geneva convention and of the Australian Criminal Code, especially in the way they sanction the use of hearsay evidence and evidence obtained by coercion and in not permitting the accused to be privy to all the evidence.

Whilst the government has argued that only the military judge who is presiding over Mr Hicks's case can sanction the use of such evidence, it fails to add that, under the military commission system, the US Secretary of Defense has unprecedented power to determine the rules and procedures for how these military judges will be selected. In addition, these US military commissions seek to remove the application of the Geneva convention and make it impossible for detainees like David Hicks to challenge the legality of their detention.

The Attorney-General admits that neither he nor the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions has seen the evidence against David Hicks, yet the government continues to argue that David Hicks cannot be tried in Australia. Based on what evidence? And whilst he continues to argue that David Hicks cannot be tried in Australia because it would require retrospective legislation, the most recent charges laid against David Hicks rely on the use of retrospective legislation. In the face of growing expert legal opinion suggesting that Mr Hicks can be tried here, it is incumbent on the government to release the advice provided by the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions concerning the viability of charging David Hicks in Australia. I believe that it is time to bring David Hicks back home to receive a fair trial in the interests of preserving and protecting his basic rights and in the interests of upholding the rule of law.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hatton)**—Is the motion seconded?



**Mr Tanner**—I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

**Mr CAMERON THOMPSON** (Blair) (4.28 pm)—I thank the member for Calwell for moving the motion in the House about David Hicks, but I want to disagree directly with some of the contents of the motion, some of the assertions the member for Calwell has made and some of the findings that she has been quite happy to cobble together in support of her case. Primarily, it seems to me that the opposition's case on Mr Hicks relies on a series of misrepresentations of different parts of law, either in relation to the Geneva convention on prisoners of war or in relation to the way Australian criminal law might apply to Mr Hicks. In either case, the opposition is taking a little of one and a little of another and mixing them together in a way they are not meant to be mixed at all.

The result of that is that inferences are made about Mr Hicks that I think even the Leader of the Opposition has some difficulty with. While the Leader of the Opposition has said in the past that he wants to get David Hicks home, I think all Australians firstly want to see Mr Hicks charged and tried in a manner that can put to bed the allegations that have been made against him. The allegations are severe and very serious. There is no way that the charges against him of attempted murder in violation of the law of war and of providing material support for terrorism should be allowed not to be heard. There is no way that they should be neglected or pushed to one side because of a confection of assertions about two disparate bodies of law—laws for prisoners of war and the Australian Criminal Code—such as has been presented by the member opposite.

Mr Hicks's representatives have not contested that he has had an association with the Kosovo Liberation Army, Lashkar-e-Taiba, al-Qaeda and the Taliban. There is a very strong body of evidence that is basically agreed to on both sides about Mr Hicks's activities during the period that covers the charges against him. As I said before, the question that arises is: is Mr Hicks to be subject to the Geneva convention—that is, as a prisoner of war—because he was with those organisations, or is he to be treated as someone who was engaged in criminal activity? The fundamental problem in this case, which has huge ramifications for the body of legal thought across the world, is that he falls into a grey area in between.

The law that apply to mercenaries in article 47 of the Geneva convention—you have to ask if David Hicks was endeavouring to be a mercenary associated with these organisations—states that a mercenary is a person who is specially recruited to be part of an armed conflict and that they take direct part in the hostilities, but it assumes that they are part of a party to the conflict, part of an army of a state, and are brought in to work as mercenaries with the army of that state. The

Geneva convention deals with the armies of states, and obviously, when talking about Lashkar-e-Toiba or al-Qaeda, that definition gets very difficult. The assertion by the opposition that you could apply Australian law has been challenged by a range of people, most notably the Australian Director of Public Prosecutions, Damian Bugg, who has been quoted as saying at estimates that there is no way that Australian law can be applied to Mr Hicks. Also, in an article on the ABC, Gillian Triggs, Director of the Institute for Comparative and International Law, has said there would be difficulty applying Australian law to David Hicks. Members of the opposition who want to bring Mr Hicks back for trial are off the track. (*Time expired*)

**Mr TANNER** (Melbourne) (4.33 pm)—The principle at the heart of the issue that is before the House today has been central to 100 years of evolution of common law and the individual freedoms that we take for granted in nations that have been built on the British legal tradition. The principle is also central to the belief systems which we are purportedly upholding in our battle against fundamentalist terrorists. That principle is the right of the individual to be protected from arbitrary imprisonment. It may seem quaint and odd that we should need to worry about the prospect of governments locking people up and throwing away the key without charging them or subjecting them to any kind of independent judicial process, but that still occurs in many countries in the world and the absence of that is one of the fundamental things that makes Australia a great country and makes the other British common law countries so strong and robust when it comes to individual freedoms. That is ultimately what this issue is about: the right of individuals not to be arbitrarily and indefinitely imprisoned by the state.

It goes as far back as 1627 and the battles between Charles I and the parliament in the famous five-knights case, or Darnell's case, where the knights had refused to pay forced loans and were arbitrarily imprisoned by the Crown as a result. There have been many landmarks in the historical development of this core principle and the entrenching of the notion of habeas corpus as a central component of our legal system and our rights. The basic principle is that individuals cannot be held indefinitely without trial by the state.

David Hicks has been held now for five years with no trial and with no serious attempt by the Australian government to get him out or to uphold his rights as an individual, and it is still unclear when he will be tried. There appears to be evidence to suggest that he is guilty of a range of things, that he has associated himself with al-Qaeda and with the Taliban and that he has done bad things or intended to do bad things. We do not know the full details. We have not heard his defence. We have not heard alternative explanations. These have not been tested in any court of law. No jury

has been asked to examine all the evidence, to hear the arguments, to hear the evidence of David Hicks and those seeking to prosecute him and to form a view and make a judgement; nor has any judge been asked to hand down a sentence based on any kind of guilty finding. Those principles are at the core of our legal system and central to the individual rights of all Australian citizens, no matter how bad they may be as individuals and no matter how bad we may think they are.

The Howard government has brushed all of these principles aside. You hear the mealy-mouthed obfuscations of the Attorney-General and the back-of-the-hand observations from various supporters and cheer squad members of the Howard government: 'Well, he's really a terrorist. He's consorting with terrorists.' In other words, it does not matter and the core legal principles that govern the rights of all individuals in our nation are dispensable and can be arbitrarily removed or brushed aside by a government—by the United States government or by our government—at its whim. That is ultimately a recipe for governments being able to arbitrarily imprison people indefinitely without trial, without charge and without a jury of their peers determining whether or not they have committed any crime.

And this from the party of individual freedoms, the party that calls itself the Liberal Party, the party that purportedly stands up for the dignity of the individual and is there to uphold the rights of individual against the intrusions of authoritarian states! In fact what it reveals is that the DNA of the Liberal Party is predominantly 'authoritarian' DNA, not 'individual freedom' DNA. Arbitrary imprisonment is the hallmark of arbitrary government and abusive power by governments.

Yes, mistakes are being made. We have seen a Canadian citizen who went to Syria and was allegedly tortured because he was wrongly believed to be associated with terrorism. We have seen a Lebanese man kidnapped in the Balkans and ultimately tortured when clearly he was the wrong person. Do we know what David Hicks is guilty of, if anything? No, not until there has been a proper trial in a proper court where he has the right to defend himself and where he has the ability to put his case. That is the issue here. It is not about whether he is a bad man or a good man; it is about whether the right of all Australian citizens to have a fair trial and not be arbitrarily imprisoned by the state is to be upheld. That is what needs to be enforced. (*Time expired*)

**Mrs MIRABELLA** (Indi) (4.38 pm)—I rise to speak against the motion moved by the member for Calwell. I am sure that she knows that we will have to agree to disagree on this particular motion. Depending on who you speak to, Hicks is either a poor unfortunate soul who went off the rails—who left suburban Adelaide and his young family and tried his luck in the

foothills of Afghanistan in the middle of a war whilst immersing himself in Islamic theory and was simply caught in the wrong place at the wrong time in a post-September 11 world—or a murderous terrorist who trained in secret terrorist camps with the sole intention of killing 'heretic' Westerners.

However, that aside, like most Australians, I want Mr Hicks charged and I want him to be punished for any actions that have promoted terrorism. He has a right to respond to the serious allegations against him through judicial proceedings. I do not, however, support the notion that we should bring Hicks home at any cost. It should be pointed out that the Attorney-General, the foreign minister and the Prime Minister have at all times discussed with their American counterparts the need to have Hicks charged. The government has welcomed the initial step in the military commission proceedings which brings Mr Hicks closer to trial. They are very serious charges: attempted murder in violation of the laws of war and providing material support for terrorism. The moment we succumb to the ceaseless cries for 'justice' for Hicks, we are effectively seeking his return to Australia without having the serious allegations against him tested. Provided there is no additional appeal by Hicks—unlike his legal team's appeals, which have contributed to the delays in hearing the case—he will be brought to trial before the military commission. Let us not forget that Hicks's legal team, through its appeals, has also contributed to the seemingly long time of Hicks's detention in Guantanamo Bay.

The member for Calwell talks about retrospective legislation in this motion. She follows the lead of her Victorian colleague the member for Wills who has suggested that Hicks should simply be brought home at any cost, with little thought of the practical consequences of such a move. The Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions has given advice that Mr Hicks cannot be prosecuted in Australia. There is no avenue for charging Mr Hicks under Australian law unless the relevant charges are made to operate retrospectively. The government is advised by the USA that the charges announced recently against Mr Hicks are not retrospective.

I suggest that members opposite might ponder more deeply the threat of international terrorism and the fact that Mr Hicks himself was to be tried before a military commission in Guantanamo Bay on charges of conspiracy to commit war crimes, attempted murder by an unprivileged belligerent and aiding the enemy before imploring the government to get Mr Hicks home at any cost. These are very serious charges indeed.

Australia has seen firsthand the effects of the evils of terrorism in the modern age. We saw its brutality on 11 September 2001 with the mass murder of innocents who had simply arrived for at their workplace for the

day. We saw it again in Bali on 12 October 2002. As a nation we were scarred by these tragic events which were carried out by the evil perpetrators of misguided and perverse acts of terrorism against innocent civilians.

The great problem I have in pulling out all stops to support Mr Hicks is the fact that we are dealing with an individual who has acknowledged training with al-Qaeda and rejoined al-Qaeda even after the September 11 attacks in the USA. Reports in the press on the weekend stated that Mr Hicks is the subject of a new investigation by the Indian government over his attacks on their armed forces in Kashmir.

Whilst the Australian government is of the view that Mr Hicks should be brought to trial as soon as possible by continuing to press for Mr Hicks's case to be dealt with expeditiously and fairly, I have little intention of doing anything more for an Australian who has trained in al-Qaeda camps with the intention of killing Westerners. I therefore oppose the motion moved by the member for Calwell.

**Ms KATE ELLIS** (Adelaide) (4.43 pm)—I rise to speak in support of the member for Calwell's motion, which calls for an end to the ongoing detention without trial of South Australian man David Hicks. It is a fundamental role of the Australian government to protect and promote the interests of all Australian citizens—not just the citizens that they like and agree with—and make sure that they get a fair go by ensuring that they are treated with basic fairness under the rule of law. Members opposite seem to think it is our job to determine whether David Hicks is a good bloke or not. It is not. That is not the assertion we are putting forward. It is our job to uphold the principle that one is innocent until proven guilty and that one has the right to a fair trial. That is the government's job and it has shamefully failed in this case.

Labor members have been vocal from the very outset on the issue of David Hicks's detention. For the past five years Labor has argued that David Hicks should be charged and tried using a legal process that is consistent with both international and Australian standards. We have argued that the legal process by which David Hicks has been detained has been deeply flawed and is unacceptable for Australian citizens. We have been highly critical of the United States military commission process, which we have argued does not afford an acceptable standard of justice for Australian citizens and is in breach of both the Geneva convention and the Australian Criminal Code. It is worth reflecting that as early as 2001 the then Labor leader, Simon Crean, was calling for David Hicks to be returned to Australia, arguing that 'the Australian government should be taking all steps necessary to bring him back here for justice in accordance with Australian law'. But these calls for adherence to Australian legal principles have fallen

on deaf ears, and the Howard government has continued to allow David Hicks, an Australian citizen, to remain in detention without trial for five long years.

In Australian streets, however, this debate has been gaining momentum. In my electorate of Adelaide, residents are becoming increasingly disturbed by the Howard government's handling of Hicks's situation. They are outraged that an Australian citizen could be subjected to a US legal process that has been deemed unacceptable for the United States' own citizens and be locked up for so long without charge. For this reason and for the information of the Prime Minister, I would like to outline some of the sentiments being expressed to me by the people of my electorate. A woman recently wrote to me to ask:

How can our Government allow an Australian citizen to be tried under a system that does not allow an accused to have access to all evidence against them? Does our Government condone an unbalanced level of power in a legal system? ... Does our government believe people are guilty until proven innocent?

These are questions that deserve an answer. I call on government members present today to outline their case, because, disturbingly, another theme emerging from correspondence on this issue is one of alienation from the political process, a sense of hopelessness and a resentment that this government is allowing an Australian to be held under a legal process that falls well short of international legal standards. One constituent, asking me to pass on this message to the foreign minister, wrote:

I am still of the opinion that nothing I or anyone else says or does can shift the cold hard hearts of this Government but to do nothing implies endorsement of your actions.

Another stated:

I am absolutely appalled by this situation and embarrassed to be an Australian ...

Another asked:

How can we as a nation remain powerless to do anything?

Another local man wrote to me explaining:

I am very concerned with the Government's treatment (or lack thereof) of Mr Hicks. I find the Government's treatment of this matter to be hypocritical, inequitable and inhumane. This is the first time I've written to any member of parliament to voice my opinion and I hope that you can, in some way, bring my increasing concern for the physical and mental welfare of David Hicks to the Government's attention in the hope that he will be released in the immediate future.

I agree with the people of Adelaide and I agree with the member for Calwell's motion. It is vital that we ensure that all Australian citizens are given a fair trial, that the principle of habeas corpus is maintained for Australian citizens abroad and that we unconditionally oppose unfair legal processes. I know that the Howard government may not accept the recommendations being made today, so we pledge to keep the pressure on the

government, to keep in their face about this issue and to keep campaigning until we get freedom, fairness and the right to a fair trial for all Australian citizens.

**Mr KEENAN** (Stirling) (4.48 pm)—I oppose this motion moved by the member for Calwell for a number of reasons. I think it is an extraordinary motion that we are debating here today. The member for Adelaide has really belled the cat by saying that she is campaigning for freedom for Mr David Hicks—which I think is a very different thing from what this motion actually proposes to do.

I do share the concern that has been expressed by all members in this debate about the time it has taken to charge and try Mr Hicks. It is obvious to everyone that it would have been preferable that this happen sooner. It is worth noting that a lot of this delay has been due to the fact that the process itself has been challenged through the US Supreme Court.

I do not think we should take this motion's concern about the process and somehow parlay that into a statement that we need to bring Mr Hicks home to Australia. The Australian government has advice that, if we were to do that, he would be unable to be charged under our system. It strikes me as absolutely ridiculous to ask for him to be brought home to a situation where he could not be charged.

As this issue has gathered pace, I have been pretty surprised that people seem to have forgotten how Mr Hicks came to be in American military detention, so I want to remind the House of a few pertinent facts. I hope that some of the people who have taken to sloganeering, saying 'Bring Hicks home', will listen to some of these facts because I think they are quite important. There have been times in this debate, in this House and also in the wider community, when I have thought that Mr Hicks had been charged with some misdemeanour, some relatively minor crime. In fact, he is facing the extremely serious charges of attempted murder and providing material support for terrorism. This is a man who, by his own admission, chose the path of violence to defend militant Islam, a man who was so supportive of al-Qaeda and its actions on September 11 that he chose to defend the regime that harboured these evil people. In a letter home to his parents he described himself as 'a full member' of the Taliban—a full member of a regime that tortured children and violated the human rights of the people of Afghanistan in the most barbaric of ways. By his own admission, Mr Hicks has trained with Lashkar-e-Taiba, a known terrorism organisation. By his own admission, with that terrorist organisation he engaged Indian soldiers across the line of control in Kashmir. This is a man who said in a letter home that he aspired to be a martyr fighting the friends of Satan, who were, in his mind, the enemies of Islam. These enemies, according

to Mr Hicks, included the Western societies that he believed were dominated by Jewish interests.

Astonishingly, this motion demands that Mr Hicks be brought back to Australia even though the government has said that it has advice that he could not be charged and tried here, so members of the Labor Party are saying that they are happy to see Mr Hicks return home to become a free member of the community and to face no recriminations for his actions. That is an extraordinary thing for somebody in this place to champion. The proposer of this motion has taken what I consider to be a rightful concern about the length of Mr Hicks's detention and has turned that into saying unequivocally that he needs to be brought home—when he cannot face charges here—to be free in our community. That is an extraordinary response. It is an incorrect response. The correct response is to do what the Australian government has actually been doing, and that is to pressure its US counterpart to process Mr Hicks through the system more speedily. This approach has actually yielded results. We saw that when the charges that were to be laid were announced within the last fortnight.

A lot of this motion deserves further scrutiny, particularly the idea that somehow hearsay evidence is alien to a system of charging people under these circumstances. In fact, hearsay evidence has consistently been used as evidence before such things as military commissions and international criminal tribunals. That precedent goes back to Nuremberg. Hearsay evidence can be admitted under the military commission system where it is considered to have probative value. However, it may be excluded where the evidence is demonstrated to be unreliable.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)**—Order! The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

#### **Human Rights: Burma**

**Mr BAIRD** (Cook) (4.53 pm)—by leave—I move the motion as amended in the terms circulated to honourable members:

That the House:

- (1) notes that Nobel Peace Prize winner Aung San Suu Kyi, General Secretary of the National League for Democracy in Burma:
  - (a) remains under house arrest and incommunicado;
  - (b) has been in prison or under house arrest for 11 of the past 17 years; and
  - (c) is only one of over 1,100 political prisoners in Burma;
- (2) calls on the State Peace and Development Council of Burma to:

- (a) allow its citizens to peacefully exercise their rights to freedom of association and assembly; and
  - (b) immediately and unconditionally release all people who have been arrested for the peaceful exercise of these rights;
- (3) notes that on 12 January 2007, nine out of fifteen countries in the UN Security Council voted in support of a non-punitive resolution on Burma and in debate on the resolution all Council members registered their concern about the situation there; and
- (4) expresses its concern regarding the 500,000 displaced people in Burma and the further 150,000 displaced people on the Thai border in refugee camps.

In 1998 Ko Thet Win Aung, a prisoner of conscience, was imprisoned in Burma for organising peaceful small-scale student demonstrations calling for the release of political prisoners and improvements to education. He was tortured during his imprisonment and suffered from malaria. He protested against the poor diet and medical treatment of prisoners by going on a hunger strike in 2002. By 2005 he was reported to have been unable to walk assisted. On 16 October last year, Ko Thet Win Aung, aged 34, died in prison.

This is just one individual case of human rights abuse. At least six deaths in custody have been reported since January 2005 in which individuals in pre-trial detention and prisons are suspected to have died as a result of either a lack of adequate medical attention, torture or ill treatment. In all cases the bodies have been promptly cremated, preventing any autopsy or analysis of physical evidence.

There are countless cases of political oppression, torture and other human rights abuses in Burma under the current regime. Over 1,100 political prisoners languish in Burmese prisons for no reason other than simply expressing their political views. The most high-profile political prisoner in Burma is Aung San Suu Kyi. She was democratically elected as Prime Minister in 1990 but has never assumed that office as the results of that election were nullified and the military has refused to hand over power. She was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1991. She has now been held in detention for 11 of the past 17 years and Burma's military regime has not indicated any likelihood of her release.

This is an appalling state of affairs. When we speak of Aung San Suu Kyi and the many other political prisoners in Burma we are reminded of how precious those basic tenets of freedom and democracy are. We are lucky enough to be able to take these things for granted here in Australia.

When I represented Australia at the United Nations General Assembly in September last year—along with the member for Denison, who is here in the chamber and shares my strong concerns on this issue,—I had the opportunity to represent the Minister for Foreign Affairs at a forum on Burma chaired by the US first lady,

Laura Bush. This forum focused on what pressure could be placed on the Burmese regime and was attended by non-government organisations and diplomatic representatives from Singapore, Thailand, Japan, the Philippines and Canada. It highlighted the plight of two million displaced Burmese.

We spoke about the aggression of the military, which has been responsible for significant human rights abuses, particularly in the treatment of women. There have been 625 documented cases of sexual assault of women and children. One hundred and twenty-five were raped by officers, often in front of troops and sometimes involving gang rape. Twenty-one cases resulted in death. Thirty per cent of victims were under 18 and the youngest was eight years old.

Governments of the world are aware of the urgent need for democratic political reform in Burma. Only last month, on 12 January 2007, nine of the 15 countries in the UN Security Council voted in support of a non-punitive resolution on Burma, while all members of the council registered their concern about the situation in Burma during the debate.

The government has repeatedly called for the Burmese regime to commit itself to a genuine process of democratic political reform and to adhere to international human rights standards. The Minister for Foreign Affairs, Mr Downer, spoke to the Burmese foreign minister in Kuala Lumpur on 26 July last year about Australia's concerns. Our embassy in Rangoon continues to take every opportunity to encourage reform and to exert strong pressure for the release of all political prisoners.

Australia has a longstanding program providing food and shelter and health support to a large number of Burmese refugees in the Thai-Burma border camps. The government is spending \$703,000 on this program for the year and a further \$500,000 is being spent to provide education to children in those camps. In Burma proper we are providing \$11.3 million in humanitarian assistance, particularly in health services.

We must continue to put pressure on Burma's regime to change. We cannot rest until significant changes have come to pass in Burma. We must continue to bring our strongest pressure to bear on the Burmese regime to address the ongoing abuse of the legal system to silence peaceful dissent and debate and to prosecute people who have reported allegations of human rights violations. The government of Burma has had every opportunity to embrace change, however small. As per the motion, I call on the UN Security Council to continue to scrutinise closely the concerning human rights record of the Burmese government. (*Time expired*)

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)**—Is the motion seconded?

**Mr KERR** (Denison) (4.58 pm)—I second the motion. I am very pleased to be able to speak in support of the motion moved by the member for Cook. The member for Cook correctly draws attention to the fact that we shared the honour of being this parliament's representatives at the General Assembly of the United Nations last year. Amongst the events we both attended was a meeting of concerned ASEAN parliamentarians who spoke about their concerns about human rights abuses in Burma. One of the messages that came through is that there is a degree of politeness within ASEAN and associated countries that has for a long time masked the real concern that exists throughout our region about the kinds of abuses that occur.

Sadly, we do not live in a perfect world and there are gradations of abuses. In our region, Burma is not the only country ruled by a military junta: sadly, Thailand has found itself in a circumstance where a military coup took place and is now run by a military government—at least for the short term, although there have been undertakings to return to civilian rule—and Fiji too has military rule. It is not possible to compare either instance with the one that applies in Burma.

Burma has seen some of the worst instances of human rights abuses perpetrated by any of our neighbours. It requires this parliament to continually raise the fact that we know these things to be happening, that we want our government to continue to press the case for human rights reform, that we want Asian and ASEAN nations as fellow neighbours in this region to also press that case and not be too deferential to a member of their own grouping and that we want the United Nations to continue to bring pressure to bear. But, most of all, we want change in Myanmar—or Burma, no matter how it is termed—such that Aung San Suu Kyi is released, such that people can have at least minimum standards of freedom and opportunity and an ability to live a life not subject to the kind of repression that is plainly too evident from all reports that have come from that country since the military takeover in 1990.

There are large numbers of political prisoners in Burma. There are allegations of forced labour and very easily substantiated cases of the use of military power against ethnic and religious minorities in that country. There are also reports of intolerance towards religious minorities. All these things come together in a way that distinguishes the case of Myanmar, or Burma, from any of our near neighbours. This is a government that needs not only human rights support but also continual challenges from those who would seek to be its friends, and would wish to be its friends, to say that the way in which they conduct their affairs is unacceptable.

Australia does have a good record in pressing these cases, but I do think we have a greater task in our region. There is an increasing number of parliamentari-

ans from elected parliaments who are prepared to speak out throughout the region. The member for Cook and I met with parliamentarians who had bravely spoken out on this issue from the Philippines, Thailand and a number of other neighbouring countries. It is not as if we are tilling ground which does not have the opportunity to be fertile. But we do have to acknowledge that within ASEAN there is this historical unwillingness to confront the weaknesses and frailties of a member state. We need to give encouragement to speak the truth rather than be deferential and too courteous in an environment where people's human rights are so violently being abused. I support entirely the terms of the motion proposed by the member for Cook, and I hope it can receive the support of all parliamentarians, without dissent, who speak today.

**Mrs MOYLAN** (Pearce) (5.03 pm)—May I acknowledge my colleague the member for Cook and thank him for the opportunity to speak on this motion calling for the State Peace and Development Council in Myanmar to allow its citizens to peacefully exercise their rights to freedom of association and assembly, and to immediately and unconditionally release all people who have been arrested for the peaceful exercise of their rights.

Those of us who are privileged to live in a democratic country find it difficult to conceive of circumstances where the right to freedom of political association could result in incarceration and where the results of a democratic election are overturned by a military regime, thus denying the majority the right to govern. As the member for Denison has pointed out, we have seen military coups in recent times in Thailand and in Fiji, but the events in Burma since 1988 have been particularly concerning because of the human rights that followed that military coup.

Power was seized by the military coup in Burma in 1988. The military government called national elections in May 1990. Aung San Suu Kyi, who had returned to Burma in 1988 to care for her ailing mother, led a revolt against the then dictator General Ne Win. Under Aung San Suu Kyi's leadership, the NLD had a convincing win in the polls of that year, despite the fact that she had been placed under house arrest and disqualified from standing. Aung San Suu Kyi has spent 10 years under house arrest and the junta has remained in control since. There have been numerous complaints about human rights abuses over that time, including military attacks against civilians in ethnic minority regions and the detention of political prisoners. Indeed, I understand there are 1,100 political prisoners in Burmese jails.

There are allegations of Burmese soldiers using civilians as human minesweepers, forcing them to walk in front of the government troops. Human Rights Watch has received reports that, to demine areas to be

traversed by the Burmese army, soldiers for the 66th Light Infantry Division forced civilians from 12 villages in the Toungoo district to walk or ride tractors ahead of troops on the road between Toungoo and Mawchi. Human Rights Watch reports that the use of landmines in Burma is widespread and used against civilians to terrorise them and hamper the annual harvest season. The Burmese government is the only government, I understand, in the world that has used anti-personnel mines on a regular basis throughout 2006. According to the International Campaign to Ban Landmine's *Landmine Monitor Report 2006*, 231 people were killed or injured by landmines planted by government forces and non-state armed groups in 2005. Many more deaths and injuries go unreported.

A draft resolution on Burma at the UN Security Council recently failed. This is unfortunate as there is no pressure for the governing junta to bring about much needed reforms. The failure of the resolution means that thousands of innocent Burmese people will continue to suffer and that international peace and security will continue to be threatened.

Our Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Alexander Downer, has been consistent in calling for change, and late last year he again urged the Burmese regime to demonstrate genuine progress towards democratic political reform and to undertake constructive dialogue and reconciliation with all political and ethnic groups. The foreign minister has been extremely outspoken on this and other matters in the region where human rights abuses and law and order issues prevail.

In April 2005 Australia cosponsored resolutions condemning human rights abuses in Burma at the Commission on Human Rights, and again in the Third Committee in late 2006. Australia remains concerned about human rights in Burma, in particular about the welfare and human rights of Burmese displaced persons from a range of ethnic groups fleeing across the border to Thailand. As outlined in this motion, there are concerns about the estimated 500,000 displaced people in Myanmar and a further 150,000 displaced people in refugee camps on the Thai border. I support this motion and I once again acknowledge the work of the member for Cook in bringing this motion before the House.

**Mr GARRETT** (Kingsford Smith) (5.08 pm)—I too rise to support the motion moved by the member for Cook on human rights in Burma and also to support the remarks by my colleague the member for Denison and most recently those by the member for Pearce. This motion comes at a critical time. It remains a matter of the greatest concern that Aung San Suu Kyi, the General Secretary of the National League for Democracy in Burma, is still under house arrest after all these years. She is a figure of worldwide renown. It is a matter of the gravest concern, which I know is shared by

parliamentarians in this House and in other places, that she remains under house arrest.

Regrettably her imprisonment by the regime in Burma is shared by at least another thousand or more of her fellow citizens, because in Burma at this time, at the beginning of 2007, there is still suppression of democracy and the consistent violation of the human rights of the Burmese people. In particular we see the continuing refugee crisis and the use of non-paid child labour by the regime. We see the prospect of greater instability in the region, something which I know has been a matter of concern to the United States and others, but above all we see the serious and continuing erosion of human rights for the people in Burma.

This is a time when the world needs to focus its attention on this country. This is a time when we need to recognise that, in a period of difficult struggle for a people and when the international environment does not necessarily lend itself to issues being easily resolved, it is important that we have motions such as this in the House and it is all the more important that we speak and act for the people in Burma.

Some 28 resolutions on this matter have gone to the UN General Assembly and to the Commission on Human Rights. This is a matter which parliamentarians and nations worldwide have spoken and acted on. The draft resolution on 12 January this year, which had support for a non-punitive resolution on Burma, regrettably suffered a veto because of actions by both China and Russia. Also regrettably, I note that Indonesia abstained from the vote.

We have had representations from the Burmese community to this parliament. They have spoken to us eloquently of the situation faced by their fellow countrypeople who are still living with the regime. They report with great poignancy on the sorts of burdens that the Burmese people face. There are half a million people displaced within the country and hundreds of thousands in refugee camps on the Thai border, and last year's reports of attacks on the ethnic minorities in Eastern Burma were particularly worrying.

If we add to this situation in Burma the response of the junta itself, with the suspension of International Red Cross visits and the refusal of the regime to accommodate the UN special envoys and the Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, all the while reports of torture, of forced relocation and of the recruitment of children to the military are adding to the scope and seriousness of what is facing the people in Burma at this time, international concern is understandable and international outrage, dare I say, is necessary.

I think that Australia can continue to play an important role in this issue, and I certainly urge the Australian government to make representations as necessary both to the Chinese government and to the Indonesian government, and to some of ASEAN nations who have

shown some reluctance to pick up and concentrate on the issue of Burma. Regrettably, it has tended to be handballed around the ASEAN nations. I think the ASEAN nations have a responsibility to tend to the flowering of democracy in this region. When the impositions by the junta and when the cruelty and the restrictions of human rights are so evident in a place like Burma, clearly there is an imperative for ASEAN nations to pay some attention to this issue and for Australia, in particular, to make those representations.

Thet Win Aung, who was a student leader and had been a prisoner of conscience since 1998, passed away recently at 34 years of age. He was imprisoned because of his conscience and because of his love for his country and the hope he had that his country could be a place where democratic freedoms were maintained. I support the motion. (*Time expired*)

**Mr HENRY** (Hasluck) (5.14 pm)—I rise in support of this motion on human rights in Burma and thank my colleague the member for Cook for placing this important issue on the *Notice Paper*. I support many of the comments that have been made by previous speakers. It is unbelievable that the Oxford educated and Nobel Peace Prize recipient Aung San Suu Kyi languishes in Burma under house arrest. She has been detained for 11 of the past 17 years without charge or trial by the ruling military. Aung San Suu Kyi is a remarkable person. Her pursuit of democracy to enable a better life for the people of Burma in a non-violent way has been inspirational to many. In a world that often seeks to resolve differences with violence, terrorism or war, she is truly worthy of inclusion alongside Mahatma Gandhi and Nelson Mandela.

In 1988 a massive student pro-democracy demonstration broke out in Burma in direct opposition to the ruling military junta. Burmese troops reacted with violence to quell the democracy demonstrations. In the wake of that massacre, Aung San Suu Kyi led an opposition movement—the National League for Democracy. Based on her Buddhist faith and Aung San Suu Kyi's message of unity, discipline and love, the NLD gained momentum throughout the nation. Six months later, Aung San Suu Kyi and other democracy leaders were placed under house arrest. This was the start of many years of imprisonment or house arrest.

Aung San Suu Kyi's National League for Democracy captured some 80 per cent of the seats of the electoral assembly in 1989, and she was effectively Prime Minister elect. However, the military refused to respect these democratic elections and continued to retain power. Burma became a human rights disaster zone, as we have heard from other speakers today. Political dissidents are routinely imprisoned and tortured. Around 9,000 people are held in prisons for nothing more than campaigning for democracy. In 1998 over 114,000 refugees were in refugee camps on the Thai border.

One of the most serious attacks on democracy occurred on 30 May 2003, when the National League for Democracy convoy was viciously attacked outside Depayin. National League for Democracy members arrested during the Depayin massacre have since been sentenced to prison terms ranging from seven to 22 years for alleged contact with illegal organisations. Their trials were held inside prison, with no access to legal counsel or representation. Aung San Suu Kyi was once again arrested and imprisoned. ASEAN responded with unprecedented pressure, calling for the release of Aung San Suu Kyi. She was removed from prison but once again placed under house arrest.

Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon. Alexander Downer, again called for the release of all political prisoners last year. The federal government has repeatedly called for the Burmese regime to commit itself to a genuine process of democratic and political reform and to adhere to international human rights standards. The total number of political prisoners held is reported at some 9,000. Australia continues its ban on defence exports to Burma in an effort to get the Burmese military to address democratic requirements and principles and to give the Burmese people their freedom and liberty. Travel restrictions have been placed on senior regime and State Peace and Development Council figures in support of this.

The Australian government provides humanitarian assistance of \$11.3 million to those in need. There is an aid program to assist the refugees in the Thai-Burma camps. An additional \$1.2 million will go towards the education of children in those camps. Last financial year 1,100 humanitarian visas were granted to Burmese people, with the current intake expected to double. The stalemate continues, despite global pressure on Burma's ruling generals. When Vaclav Havel nominated Aung San Suu Kyi for the Nobel Peace Prize, he said:

She has refused to be bribed into silence by permanent exile. Under house arrest, she has lived in truth. She is an outstanding example of the power of the powerless.

As a democratically elected member of parliament, Aung San Suu Kyi deserves the support of all humanity. Her people's plight must continue to be placed in the spotlight. Freedom, liberty and democracy should belong to all people in this world today. We must work actively towards establishing the environment to ensure that this occurs. I again acknowledge the member for Cook for raising this matter in the parliament today.

**Mr LAURIE FERGUSON** (Reid) (5.18 pm)—As a member involved with support groups in Sydney over many years and also with individual ethnic minorities such as the Karen, who, perhaps of all the groups, have been most resistant to the government's encroachment, I commend the member for Cook for his gesture today in moving this motion on human rights in Burma.



However, on a day when there has been criticism of the Prime Minister for meddling in the affairs of the United States, I would urge this government to meddle more clearly in the affairs of Burma. The member for Cook and the member for Hasluck quite correctly stressed the aid program, which is very commendable and very widely praised, but at the same time Australia has been involved in limited engagement with the regime, which is not quite as forthright, as strong or as valuable as the role of the United States and the European community.

One of the problems internationally has been the lack of solidarity with regard to these measures, and that was most recently demonstrated at the UN, where not only did China and Russia use the veto but they were joined by South Africa in supporting the regime. I note the comments of Archbishop Desmond Tutu in which he strongly reprimanded the South African government for forgetting its own history. Equally, we have had a situation where at various stages India and China, for their own geopolitical self-interest, have tended not to show solidarity in respect of these measures.

Even today, in the *Sydney Morning Herald*, we note the comments of the Indian foreign minister, Pranab Mukherjee, who promised 'favourable responses' for a 2003 request by the Burmese regime to be armed by India. That country has already supplied field guns and howitzers. The pretext for Indian assistance is that the Burmese regime would help India with regard to insurgent forces in the Assam area that are operating out of Burma. The record shows in the article in the *Sydney Morning Herald* that, rather than the Burmese regime working against these insurgents, there is actually very strong evidence of complicity with them. Equally, China is very keen not only to exploit raw materials in the country, not only to get from the regime bargain prices for various products; it is also very interested in a number of naval bases in Burma that are being upgraded at the moment.

There is a need for a lot more solidarity internationally with regard to these measures, but of course there have been some worthwhile gestures. The International Labour Organisation has taken up the question of slave labour and child labour in the country and has moved towards a possible reference to the International Court of Justice. Equally, Human Rights Watch has constantly attacked the use of landmines in the country. The European community, which has taken a forthright position in these matters, has signalled to ASEAN in current free trade agreement negotiations the possibility that it will not sign this agreement if Burma is a party to it and has hinted at the possibility of bilateral agreements with other countries because of other problems with Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia and the state that they are in.

We have a situation where there is international pressure. I have a slightly different read from the member for Kingsford Smith. I say that, while ASEAN has been historically backward with regard to interference in the internal affairs of its parties, it has in recent years shown a greater predilection to taking more initiatives on this front. So, while we cannot be totally satisfied, there have indeed been moves. I think it is very encouraging that the Philippines, Singapore in particular and, to some degree, Thailand have been a lot more inclined to pressure the Burmese regime. Let us be honest about it: it is easy for people in Australia to prescribe activity in Europe; it is hard for people on the doorstep. I do recognise gains in ASEAN.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. IR Causley)—**

Order! The time allotted for private members business has expired. The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 41. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

### GRIEVANCE DEBATE

Question proposed:

That grievances be noted.

#### Scullin Electorate: Child Care

**Mr JENKINS** (Scullin) (5.23 pm)—Preparing for this grievance debate is very difficult because we are confronted with a veritable panoply of grievances. As each day goes by, you can add to the list. I wish to highlight one particular grievance that I have with the delivery of a piece of public policy and an important service—that is, child care in my electorate—and then show how this has problems that are consistent with a number of other national public policy areas and the way in which the government goes about trying to solve those problems.

In my electorate over the last few weeks a number of people have been returning to work and children have been returning to school. They are starting the new year, and they have found that child-care fees have risen considerably. This is in the context of a report that was released last week by the Treasury in the Treasury roundup which indicated that problems with child care were not as a result of the scarcity of places or of increase in pricing. Really, when mandarins of a department can come to those conclusions, you wonder if they have spent too much time in Canberra and have not gotten out and about.

In the local papers in my electorate there have been a number of stories that have indicated the way in which the increase in fees is affecting people in their day-to-day lives. In the *Whittlesea Leader* of last week—6 February—under the headline, 'Fury on care fee hike', a constituent, Sylvana Iacuone of Mill Park, was quoted as indicating that now their child-care costs were \$240 a week or \$12,000 a year. This is actually

for a household that is yet to get into the home ownership market. These are people who are trying just to see their way clear. They have quite rightly made a decision that they cannot go forward without both parents working. The circumstances were that, on the return this year, without notice or with less than two weeks notice, the increase of some \$50 a week, I think, was announced to them.

This is a real problem because in fact we are seeing the corporatisation and privatisation of child care. We see companies like ABC Learning Centres, which is the company involved, slowly but surely buying up smaller private child-care concerns. The way in which this government has run child care has made it very hard for the community child-care sector.

When the Treasury made the remarks that they did, I was quite amused. I am more than amused that I have to indicate that I agree with the member for Mackellar and her statements about the Treasury analysis. This does make a very strange sort of duo—for me to be quoting from comments that the member for Mackellar has made. But I think that her 18-month chairing of the inquiry of the community affairs committee into matters to do with child care—even though it came to a rather inglorious conclusion when she perhaps ran roughshod over the committee—did expose her to this particular public policy matter.

She quite rightly says that all of the other evidence goes contra to what the Treasury has said. The Productivity Commission put out a report which said that the main reasons that parents were unable to access additional formal care were that places were booked out, it was not flexible enough to meet their needs and it was too expensive. How can we have such contrary indications by those who are giving advice to the government?

I would hope that members of the backbench of the government are using their new-found voices to place pressure on their executive and say, 'We think the Treasury has got it wrong.' If the Treasurer falls into line with that type of policy advice, he is not doing the right thing by the families of Australia, who require child-care services to ensure that they go forward. We have had the infamous Intergenerational Report that the Treasurer talked about so much a few years ago. But, once the headline died, where did we see that fitting through into the way in which public policy is put together?

It was interesting to note that over the weekend—this is another grievance that I have—this \$1.5 billion package on aged care was announced in electorate of Greenway. There was no ministerial statement. Today a dorothy dixer was asked and the minister got up and talked, paraphrasing the importance of this. Another heap of money is thrown at a problem. There is no context as to where it fits into the economic and budgetary

situation of the government. Appropriation Bill (No. 3) and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) were introduced on Thursday, both with \$2.5 billion.

One would have thought that, if we were going to have big announcements already this year—an election year—of \$10 billion for the Murray-Darling Basin and \$1½ billion or whatever it is for aged care, they would be put in the context of the overall budgetary situation of the Commonwealth. I know I am perhaps asking too much, because the budget is in May, but if we are going to have these sorts of expenditures at this stage, we should be seeing the way in which they fit in.

There is no discussion of the types of problems that the Treasurer announced about how difficult it was for the Commonwealth, the nation, to go forward because of the change in the age of the workforce and the difficulties of the intergenerational transfer of these problems. Yet that is what we expect of a government: we expect a government to govern not just in the short term, to get itself re-elected, but in the longer term—to set in place a suite of policies in a whole range of policy areas that are sustainable.

We see, in an outer urban electorate like Scullin, a lack of accessible and affordable child-care places, and a lack of aged-care residential places and of sufficient numbers of packages to enable the elderly to stay at home. We hope that, in the gesture announced yesterday, there will be sufficient increase in the number of those packages that we might see the opening up of access to those services to people living in the outer urban area. But I just do not have confidence that this government will look beyond an event that is to happen towards the end of this year. We have seen, over the life of the Howard government—and predictably again now, early in an election year—the attitude that: 'The way to take things forward is to throw buckets of money at them,' the only intention of which is the re-election of the government, 'and then, ho-hum, we might think about what solutions are required.'

There has been discussion about whether this is a government led by a tired leader, or a tired government. I think it is a tired government. No matter how often they change the deckchairs of the ministry—and we welcome the new minister at the table, Mr Robb, the Minister for Vocational and Further Education—I do not think that we are going to see the sort of reinvigoration of this government that is required. They will not get it by just changing the faces, because it is the ideology, it is the context of this government that is the problem.

In faint praise of the new minister at the table, he is an example of this; he is an example of a minister who will do anything to ensure the election of the government and therefore has a horizon that is much shorter than one would expect. I think that he should be involved—as somebody who has, I think, the benefit of

this nation at heart—in looking to the longer term. He should look to the longer term and not just switch the switches that a polling group or the Textor organisation dictate that he should. If he is really interested in training, let him look at it for the long term and not for the short term.

That is what we expect of a government, and we would hope that the Howard government—and I grieve that this is not the case at the moment—will look to the longer term and see that it has a responsibility to ensure that Australia in the 21st century is a country that looks after all its citizens and looks forward to a prosperous future for those citizens.

#### **Australian Values**

**Mr PEARCE** (Aston—Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer) (5.33 pm)—As a parliamentarian, I regard it as a great privilege to have the opportunity to meet a whole range of different groups in the community, particularly in my electorate of Aston. I especially value and enjoy the occasions when I can spend time with senior Australians, because it enables me to gain much valuable knowledge—knowledge that derives directly from their great depth of experience. Seniors are the ones who have seen Australia grow up. They are our nation's living history, and it is important that their stories be heard. I, and many others in this chamber, can only imagine what it would have been like to have lived through the great moments in our history that have brought us to where we, as a nation, are today.

In the few minutes available to me in this debate today, I would like to reflect on just how far we have come as a nation. And I would like to ask the question: what kind of country have we become?

Looking back, the world emerged from the twin cauldrons of the Great Depression and World War II, the first truly global war, and entered the brave new world of the 1940s. Think about just a few of the things that happened in that decade. In 1942 the atom was split. In 1944 the world's first electronic and digital computer, called Colossus, was built. In 1945 the United Nations was established. And while all that was going on, mums and dads were enjoying Dizzy Gillespie, Frank Sinatra and Bing Crosby.

Moving forward, the 1950s saw the discovery of the helical structure of DNA in 1953. The first polio vaccine was announced in 1955 and the first organ transplants were performed in Boston and Paris in 1954. As science transformed society, the cold war became central to global relationships and the process of decolonisation unfolded in Africa and Asia. In 1957, Elvis Presley, Bill Haley and Buddy Holly were leading the way in the popular music revolution. But the 1960s was the pivotal decade in defining the path that we would travel to arrive at where we are today.

The sixties have been referred to as being a period of 'complex, interrelated cultural and political events' which are viewed 'nostalgically by those who participated in those events, and pejoratively by those who regard the time as a period whose harmful effects are still being felt today'. Or, as a pair of one-time American leftists, Peter Collier and David Horowitz, noted in their 1989 critique of the period, the sixties was a time when the 'collection of values that provide guidelines for societies as well as individuals was assaulted and mauled'.

So how far have we come today? Just a few weeks ago we celebrated Australia Day—and I think that special day provides an interesting insight into where we are right now. True to the Australian character, many would have celebrated Australia Day by enjoying a barbecue with friends and family in the backyard or at a park or the beach. I think this says something about life in Australia. When compared with global standards, life is pretty comfortable. We are generally a relaxed bunch and we do not have a lot of time for pomp and ceremony. However, perhaps sometimes our easy-going, relaxed kind of temperament dulls our awareness of how far we have actually come.

Each year there seem to be, at least to me, more and more changes that happen faster and faster. Many of the changes are positive, but there are reasons to believe that in some very important areas of life we appear to be going backwards. A philosopher once observed that life may be lived forward but can only be understood by looking backward. So, with this in mind, let us consider briefly how much better life is in Australia today than it was 30 years ago. Without doubt, Australia is most definitely a prosperous country. In terms of GDP per capita, we are ranked in the top 10 nations. Our people are amongst the best educated and we enjoy some of the highest life expectancy rates in the world. However, it is all fine to be healthy and well educated—that in itself is a great achievement—but, from a labour market perspective, access to paid employment is critical.

Australia's labour force participation rates have increased over the last 30 years. Unemployment has dropped from over six per cent in the late seventies down to a historic low of 4.5 per cent. In the early 1990s it was over 10 per cent. The real value of wages—that is, wages discounted for inflation—has increased from about \$800 in 1985 to around \$1,000 today. Our real GDP overall has almost tripled, while on a per capita basis it has nearly doubled. Productivity has nearly doubled in the last 30 years as well. In 1975, the CPI was over 16 per cent and now it is just over three per cent. Real private sector wealth has increased from about \$86,000 per person to just under \$300,000. I also think it is interesting to understand how we compare with the rest of the world. The UN Development

Program has produced the Human Development Index. In recent years, Australia has finished in the top three countries for this indicator. It is a vast improvement from 11th in 1975 and 14th in 1985.

So, with all of these significant and positive improvements, one has to ask the question: how did we arrive at this point? Without doubt, this prosperity is due in no small part to the endeavours and hard work of our senior Australians who have all selflessly contributed over many years. Yet, with all the hard work and all the resulting prosperity, and all that we have going for us as a nation these days, one can detect a certain malaise pervading our proud country. More often than not, the daily evening news is little more than a catalogue of failures that have resulted from the social revolution of the 1960s. The daily media abounds with reports about the divorce rate, domestic violence, mental illness and suicide.

While I realise that, sadly, these problems are a tragic reality for many people, there is a silver lining to this cloud. The positive thing is that most of us now feel that we may more freely discuss these issues. Perhaps a good example of what I mean here is the social stigma that used to surround suicide. There was a time, not long ago, when these tragic events were described as 'hunting accidents', even when they happened in the lounge room. Similarly, the reporting of social problems, such as domestic violence, is far better than it was in the past. Today, people who are victims thankfully have more opportunities to change their lives for the better.

In some instances, I worry whether some of these thorny problems nevertheless stem from the mauling of traditional values that I referred to earlier. We have less cohesive family structures and a new generation of Australians struggling to find their way precisely at a time when a multitude of paths and options are perceived to be opening up for most people. I am reminded of an apt verse from 1 Corinthians:

Everything is permissible, but not everything is beneficial. Everything is permissible, but not everything is constructive.

Perhaps many of the younger generations of modern Australians—and I include my own—have become anaesthetised by our own comfort and the cult of unrestrained individualism. Perhaps, at its most fundamental level, we have forgotten what the diggers went out and fought for more than twice last century. Where is the celebration in the fact that an average Australian baby has every opportunity to live a long, happy and comfortable life? What is it that we really celebrate on special occasions like Australia Day? Is it that we just enjoy another day off work?

Despite the gloomy cloud that sometimes hovers over our abundant lives, my strong conviction is that the future is bright as long as we return to those essential values that bind and secure a society. There is a lot

of talk about values. There has been a lot of hand-wringing about the nature of values. I do not think it is hard to identify the values that we need to cultivate and return to if we are to truly enjoy the results of the economic progress. But the idea of returning to values that were mauled and assaulted in the sixties and seventies is anathema to the sections of society that were actually responsible for the assaulting and the mauling. They are still around. They are the hand-wringers that just cannot seem to acknowledge the social failure of the counter-cultural revolution.

I believe we need to instil in the body of our nation values such as: freedom and responsibility—personal freedom and choice; reward for effort; free enterprise and social equality—balanced with responsibility for personal actions and supporting the needy; the family—the most important band of threads in the social fabric of life; marriage—the core or centre of the family; children—our future—as it is important to praise, uplift and invest in them; education—investing in our children; community—living out the fruits of the spirit, caring for each other and those less fortunate, mateship and volunteerism; and, of course, faith—remembering how small we are in the universe, contrasted with the innate value of every human on earth.

I believe we live in a time when each day should be a time of thanksgiving—when we remember the tough times and what our forebears fought for; when we remember the good fortune and the bounty available to us; when we remember our responsibilities and our debt to others. I think it is vital that we always ensure that we never take our fortune for granted and that we all strive to maintain it. We must always recognise who helped achieve this great result: senior Australians. And we must remember that Australia must always be the most renowned of all the lands.

#### **Australian Ex-Prisoners of War Memorial**

**Ms KING** (Ballarat) (5.44 pm)—I rise to speak in this debate to give voice to the grievance of hundreds of Australian ex-prisoners of war and their families at the government's continued refusal to have the Ex-POW Memorial located in Ballarat declared a national memorial. The government's sheer obstructiveness on this issue is extremely disappointing. Given the age and frailty of our former prisoners of war, there is some urgency in having this matter resolved.

The memorial, which I will describe for those of you who have not visited Ballarat, is breathtaking. It is a fitting memorial to former POWs across all conflicts and from across the country. Located in the surroundings of the Ballarat Botanical Gardens, the POW memorial uses the basic idea of a journey. The creator, Peter Blizzard, started a pathway, long and straight, interspersed with shapes like railway sleepers—a reference to the Burma railway. Running parallel to the pathway is a polished black granite wall 130 metres

long, etched with the names of all 35,000 Australian POWs. Standing in a reflective pool are huge basalt obelisks, up to 4.5 metres high, with the names of all the POW camps. One is fallen, to reflect the some 8,600 POWs who never made it home. The columns are out of reach and across the water, symbolising that all the POW camps were away from Australian shores. Further on there is another wall, engraved with the words 'Lest we forget', allowing for an area of contemplation and reflection on the 35,000 Australian POWs and their individual stories. It is a truly impressive and moving piece of sculpture, steeped in significance for the hundreds of families of POWs across Australia.

It was built in Ballarat for several reasons. Firstly, there was a large group of ex-POWs in Ballarat who were determined that there be a national memorial that, unlike the Changi Chapel here in Canberra, contained the names of all former POWs and recognised all conflicts and all camps in which Australians were incarcerated. The second reason was that this group was extremely dogged. They were able to obtain funding from private fundraising and all levels of government. It took them some 10 years, some of the group not living to see it built. But, finally, in a ceremony in front of over 10,000 ex-POWs and their families, the then Chief of the Defence Force, General Peter Cosgrove, the then Minister for Veterans' Affairs and the Victorian Premier, the memorial was opened.

The third anniversary of the opening of the Australian Ex-POW Memorial was on 4 February, and I welcomed the decision by the Minister for Veterans' Affairs to make his first official visit to the memorial to commemorate that anniversary. It raised some hope with the ex-POW community that the minister might be bending slightly in his decision not to grant national status to the Australian Ex-POW Memorial. Much to the frustration of many veterans and their families, this was not the case.

When the member for Dunkley became the new Minister for Veterans' Affairs there were some within the veteran community who hoped this might signify a change in government policy with regard to naming the Australian Ex-POW Memorial in Ballarat a national memorial. In his recent visit to Ballarat the minister not only again refused to recognise the memorial as a national memorial but claimed, in comments that can only be described as breathtaking flippant, that Ballarat would have to become part of the ACT if it were ever to become a national memorial; that the advice given to me from the Parliamentary Library and also from Duncan Kerr MP, the member for Denison, in his capacity as state counsel, that counters the minister's argument of legislative impediment was 'dodgy'; and that ex-POWs were really only after the government's money. I want to correct the minister on each of these points.

There is no legislative impediment to the Commonwealth establishing, funding, listing or recognising a memorial outside of Canberra as a national memorial. There are two laws that are relevant to the case: the National Memorials Ordinance 1928 and the act it is made under, the Seat of Government (Administration) Act 1910. The sole purpose of the ordinance was and is to provide a mechanism to plan for and settle any issues relating to the location and character of national memorials and the like in the ACT. In other words, if the Commonwealth wants to build a memorial on national land in the ACT then, under the ordinance, there is a plan and process established for doing so. There is nothing in the ordinance that limits the power of the Commonwealth to only establishing national memorials in the ACT. In fact, if there were then the government would have had to repeal the ordinance in order to build the national memorial in Hyde Park in London. It is absolutely bunkum for the minister to suggest otherwise.

The other important point is that as the ordinance is made under the Seat of Government (Administration) Act 1910, a reserved Commonwealth law, then as delegated legislation the ordinance may not exceed the authority granted by the principal act under which it was made—that is, even if the minister's claim were correct, namely that the ordinance did seek to restrict national memorials to the Capital Territory alone, then it would have no legal effect because in doing so it would have exceeded the bounds of power of the Seat of Government (Administration) Act 1910. For the minister to make the claim that the land the Australian Ex-POW Memorial in Ballarat sits on would have to become part of the Australian Capital Territory in order for it to be recognised as a national memorial is simply wrong in law.

The minister was provided with this advice more than 12 months ago. He has failed to reply to my letter or even to acknowledge that he received the letter providing him with this advice. He has failed to produce any alternative legal advice. Instead, he has sought to repeat incorrect information on every occasion he has been asked about this issue. The reality is that the minister's refusal to recognise the Australian Ex-POW Memorial as a national memorial is a policy decision, not one constrained by current legislation. That being the case, the minister, instead of deliberately trying to hide behind incorrect information, should be honest with the ex-POW community and simply say: 'No, I do not want to recognise the Australian Ex-POW Memorial in Ballarat as a national memorial. I have no intention of ever doing so.'

The minister has also accused the POWs of simply being after the money to maintain the memorial. That is simply not the case. It is not their motivation in seeking recognition for the national memorial. The fact that

the City of Ballarat has budgeted for the memorial's maintenance in its forward budgets for the next four years should put paid to the minister's concerns.

Finally, the minister is also concerned that recognising the memorial in Ballarat would open the floodgates, with other memorials across the country seeking national recognition. It is highly unlikely that this would be the case. There are very few memorials across the country that reflect an entire population of veterans from across the country and from across all conflicts. The one that springs to mind for me and that I have visited is the wonderful memorial in Albany that recognises the departure of our troops for Gallipoli. I think that that, rightly, would be one of the memorials that should also be recognised nationally. It would be a simple matter for the government to put in place a set of guidelines for national recognition and to seek advice from the RSL and other ex-service organisations as to what would be appropriate. The minister seems to see the memorial in Ballarat as just a Ballarat memorial. What the minister has failed to see despite visiting the memorial, where he saw families and ex-POWs who had travelled from across the country to attend the third anniversary, is that the Australian Ex-POW Memorial is not a local memorial for Ballarat ex-POWs but a memorial for all Australian ex-prisoners of war.

There are, of course, many local memorials across Australia, but there are very few national memorials. The Ex-Prisoners of War Memorial in Ballarat recognises over 35,000 ex-POWs from every corner of Australia. It was developed by ex-POWs and has the endorsement of the Ex-POW Association of Australia and the RSL. In fact, the memorial would not have been built at all without the endorsement of those two organisations. To recognise the ex-POW memorial in Ballarat as a national memorial would not in any way detract from Changi Chapel in Canberra but would recognise that ex-POWs are best placed to determine what they see as another national memorial honouring their experiences.

The minister has at times accused me of whipping this issue up, but I say to the minister that what I am doing is his job—speaking on behalf of ex-prisoners of war from my constituency and beyond. It is the minister and this government that are out of step with the veteran community on this particular issue. My advice to the minister is this: he is the Minister for Veterans' Affairs; it is his job to promote the rights and needs of veterans within the government. This means he has to stand up for them, he has to go into bat for them and he has to sometimes tell his department and the Department of Defence that they are wrong. On this issue Labor have repeatedly said that we will recognise the Australian Ex-Prisoners of War Memorial in Ballarat as a national memorial. It is the right thing to do and I again call on you to do the same.

### Northern Territory Crime

**Mr TOLLNER** (Solomon) (5.53 pm)—Today I want to talk about the No. 1 issue that people come to me with in my electorate of Solomon: crime. Darwin and Palmerston are by far the best places to live in Australia, but, unfortunately, the safety of our families is being threatened by gangs hanging out in local streets and shopping centres, by hoons paying no regard to the children playing in our streets, by itinerants taking over our parks and by hooligans threatening people as they go about their daily business. Our families deserve to feel safe in their own homes, while walking to the shops, while cycling along our pathways and when taking the kids to the local park. So today I want to outline my grievances on the lack of action on crime.

When the Labor government were elected in the Northern Territory in 2001 they made huge promises on tackling crime and then again in 2005 they made even more grand statements about reducing crime. They promised increased numbers of police and extra resources. Sadly, like most Labor governments, they say one thing but do the opposite and then when they are caught out they try to spin their way out of it. For example, the Labor government promised an extra 200 police on the beat by 2006. Their 2005 election campaign advertisement said that there were already '120 extra police out on the beat with property crime nearly cut in half.' Clare Martin also said on 17 June 2005:

We've increased police numbers by 120, we'll put in another 80 by the end of next year so we've actually got more police on the street.

But this promise was blown out of the water by the Police Association. This is what Vince Kelly, President of the Northern Territory Police Association, said on 25 August last year:

But the reality in relation to police numbers is that there will not be an extra 200 police on the beat by the end of 2006 and one only has to look at the police annual reports to know that is the case.

What is that? Is that the Police Association directly refuting the major plank of Labor's claim to be tough on crime? Vince Kelly went on to say:

So clearly there hasn't been an increase of 200. It's quite simply that the claim that there will be 200 extra police on the beat is wrong. And I think that Territorians when they hear the Police Minister say there will be 200 extra police on the beat, they think he means police officers driving around doing the job and that is just not going to happen.

So, when we have the Police Association saying that the NT Labor government have not put 120 or 200 or whatever extra police on the beat, it is clear the NT government are not living up to their own rhetoric. The NT Labor government continue to claim that they are spending more than ever in reducing crime. True, they do spend more than other states on a per capita basis.

But guess what? The crime rate has not decreased and in most cases it is increasing.

The recent report on government services provides these statistics for the Northern Territory. First, the NT government spends more than twice the Australian average on police per person. The Northern Territory spends \$788 per person; the rest of Australia spends \$304 per person. Second, across Australia 58 per cent of the population said that they had contact with police in the previous 12 months. In the Northern Territory this figure is about 75 per cent. Third, figures also show that Territorians rank very low on whether they felt 'safe' or 'very safe' after dark in their own homes. Fourth, the Territory also has a lower proportion of people who felt 'safe' or 'very safe' walking or jogging locally after dark compared to the rest of Australia. Fifth, fewer people in the NT feel either 'safe' or 'very safe' travelling on public transport after dark.

The report also stated that the proportion of Territorians who consider physical assault in a public place and family violence to be either a 'major problem' or 'somewhat of a problem' in their neighbourhood was higher than anywhere else in Australia. The Northern Territory also had the highest rate of victims of personal crime, victims of property crime and recorded victims of homicide, assault and robbery and the highest estimated number of victims of break-in and attempted break-in. That paints a pretty grim picture, but there is more.

Let us have a look at the most recent of the NT government's own crime statistics. Offences against the person in Darwin have increased by six per cent since the same time last year and sexual assaults have jumped by 17 per cent in the same period. House break-ins, break-ins to commercial premises, other theft and damage to property in Darwin are all at the higher level of the long-term average. A similar picture emerges in the city of Palmerston with assaults and sexual assaults both on the increase. There was also a statistically significant upward trend identified in the number of house break-ins in Palmerston. In addition, break-ins to commercial premises are on the rise, along with motor vehicle theft and related offences and property damage. Territory Labor's own information shows they have a pitiful record on this issue. Despite much rhetoric, spin and downright falsehoods, the NT Labor government have failed to tackle crime in our suburbs and they should hang their heads in shame.

Some people have asked me why I am getting involved in an issue that is predominately in the realm of the NT government. Initially, I like many others believed that the NT government was serious about tackling this issue, but time has shown that I was misled in this belief. The situation has got so serious that there are now suggestions by some to form community vigilante groups. This is not something I encourage, but I

can certainly understand these people's frustration. I have had a gutful of the lack of action in this area and I aim to do something about it.

A couple of months ago, in response to the many calls to my office about the spiralling problems of crime, I held a community crime forum in the suburb of Malak to hear the local community's concerns. I also invited the federal Minister for Justice and Customs, Senator Chris Ellison, to attend so that he could hear first-hand of these problems. And we did hear of problems. We heard that Malak is like a gangland, that juveniles were out of control and that houses were being broken into with alarming frequency. Over 200 residents turned up, an indication that, despite what the NT Labor Party says, crime is the No. 1 issue in the northern suburbs.

Apart from making the federal minister acutely aware of local problems, we also finally got some action from the Territory government with more police patrolling these suburbs and access to a local mobile police station. It was a pretty good result, but people should not have to go to these lengths. I plan to hold more of these forums and have already moved to form local action groups to tackle these problems from the ground up. I have also got involved in helping local organisations access funding under the Community Crime Prevention Program and other programs that tackle the causes of crime. As I stated at the start, this is the No. 1 issue in the electorate of Solomon. It is the issue that occupies people's minds the most. The Territory government have not lived up to any of their lofty promises. Our community deserves better and I intend to do something about it.

#### **Dental Health**

**Ms PLIBERSEK** (Sydney) (6.02 pm)—I am very fortunate to have the opportunity to write a column for the *Sydney Morning Herald* once a fortnight and I wrote one recently about the state of dental care in Australia. Although obviously it is an issue very close to my heart, and I know to your heart also, Mr Deputy Speaker Adams, I was frankly amazed by the response that I had to my office after that column. In the column I spoke about a couple of people that I had encountered over my time as a member of parliament, including a woman whom I referred to as 'Jackie'. That is not her real name; I changed her name to protect her identity. She is a constituent of mine and a single mum. She had left a very violent relationship and taken her two young children with her. She lived in a pretty tough part of town in public housing. She had raised the kids on her own and, like many other people in this situation, she had never spent a cent on herself; everything she did was for her kids.

She was incredibly proud when her son was accepted as a scholarship student into a quite prestigious North Shore school. Unfortunately, she could not go

with him on his first day of year 7 because her teeth were so bad that she was too ashamed to leave the house. She had been told that she could have her teeth extracted because they were so bad but there was no guarantee of when she would have dentures to replace the teeth that she had lost. It could be months; it could be years—and it was certainly looking more like years than months.

This is not the fault of Sydney Dental Hospital. They do an amazing job with stretched staff and stretched resources, but they are in an impossible situation. They are seeing people every day who are desperate. They are emergency cases. They have got bleeding gums and potential blood poisoning from the infections in their gums. They have got teeth falling from their mouths. Going a step further than dealing with those immediate emergencies, or even dealing with the longer-term care that those people need, let alone taking possible preventative care, is just beyond their resources. It is no fault of theirs. As for the woman I called the Jackie, we were able to ask as a special favour that she got some dental care.

People should not have to rely on the intervention of members of parliament or on the pro bono work that a number of very generous dentists do. I know that there are many dentists who do it. In the past the Commonwealth has taken responsibility for dental care at times. The previous Labor government had a \$100-million-a-year Commonwealth dental scheme that treated 1½ million people during this time. That scheme was junked as soon as the Howard government came to power. The Commonwealth should have such a scheme. It should be sharing responsibility with the states, and the Constitution suggests that it should. The Commonwealth does need to work with the states, and Labor has committed to doing that to help people who cannot afford to visit the dentist to look after their teeth not just in emergencies but in maintaining their oral health all the way along with preventative care as well.

The second role the Commonwealth has to accept beyond responsibility for public dental care is responsibility for ensuring that dental care remains affordable for people who wish to see their own dentists. It has to work with the private health insurers to make sure that this sort of care is available to people. An Australian Council of Social Service survey estimated that 40 per cent of Australians cannot access dental care when they need it, and the usual reason for that is the cost. An additional issue is the shortage of dentists in rural and remote areas, but the predominant issue is cost.

The third very important role that the Commonwealth has is to ensure that there are enough dentists, dental technicians and dental therapists graduating. The average age of dentists at the moment is over 50, so obviously we are looking at a lot of those people retiring in the next 10 to 15 years. Within the next four

years, it is estimated that we will be short about 1,500 dental care providers, and most of those will be dentists. We are graduating only about 250 dental students a year, so the gap between the number that we have and the number that we need is growing all the time.

I made this argument in the *Sydney Morning Herald* and, as I said, I was struck by the number of people who rang up to tell me about problems of their own, including a woman called Sue who lives in Darlinghurst. She is also a single mum and she raised a problem that is raised with me again and again—the fact that parents almost always put their children's needs ahead of their own. Sue was telling me that she found it very difficult to afford her daughter's dental care but that she scraped together enough money now and again to have her daughter's teeth checked. As for her own teeth, she, like Jackie, had had four years of serious problems with her teeth. In the end her teeth were so bad and her oral health was so bad that the dental hospital had to take out all of her teeth except for two at the front. They had to pull out her teeth because she was facing an overall decline in her health, including, obviously, the risk of extreme pain but also the risk of blood poisoning because of the infections in her gums. She has two teeth left and she was told that her dentures will take perhaps one year, perhaps two years or perhaps even longer to be fitted.

Sue was sent by her Job Network provider for a job interview as a sales assistant at David Jones. Now, you would have to be pretty optimistic, I think, to imagine that a job that relies completely on customer service is going to be given to someone who has only two front teeth. Indeed, Sue talked about the self-esteem problems that she suffered, her loss of confidence, along with the medical problems that she has had. She has taken more painkillers in the last two years, she says, than she has in the whole of the rest of her life. Her doctor is worried about her consumption of painkillers and her consumption of antibiotics because of the continuing infections in her mouth. So, on top of those health problems, her loss of confidence—her inability, she feels, to confidently apply for work—and, worse still, the social isolation that she is suffering make life impossible. Sue also missed her daughter's high school orientation because she was too ashamed to face the other parents at her daughter's school.

Sue has been given the names and numbers of some marvellous dentists that do pro bono work, but most of them have criteria for that work: they do young children or they do age pensioners, or they only look after homeless clients. They are doing fantastic work, but Sue does not fit their criteria. She has an appointment in March, and I am hoping that that will see her situation resolved quickly. But it seems cruel and unusual that in a country as wealthy as Australia we have people whose health, livelihood and participation in soci-



ety are limited by the lack of a few dollars being spent on, particularly, the sort of preventative dental care that stops problems like this from arising in the first place.

### **Pilbara Workers Housing**

**Mr HAASE** (Kalgoorlie) (6.12 pm)—I rise this evening with a grievance about the lack of available accommodation for workers in the Pilbara, specifically in the area of Port Hedland and South Hedland. For a number of years now, the state government has absolutely ignored the need for worker housing in that area, an area that is providing the impetus for growth and prosperity in this nation, with iron ore exports into China creating a boom environment. The only thing that is a hurdle to improving that prosperity is the fact that we cannot source housing to accommodate workers. Every possible opportunity to place a bed and house a worker has been well and truly taken up. Companies are buying up hotels, backpacking facilities and caravan parks and converting them into accommodation for their own employees.

This problem began around the start of 2000. The government knew full well that the iron ore industry was going to have an explosion of opportunities for exports into China, but, with the government's focus fixed on suburban Perth, there was simply no consideration of the requirement for expenditure on low-cost housing or the release of land—LandCorp were sitting on their hands. As a result, today we have a three-bedroom, one-bathroom house going for about \$1,000 a week—if you can get hold of one. Each time they become vacant the rent increases by about another 40 per cent. A house, if one comes on the market, will cost you anywhere between \$500,000 and \$700,000.

It is an enormous problem that has existed for too long and, because the state government has done nothing to ease the problem, a mere 70 housing blocks have been released in the past four years. There were going to be some 370 blocks made available but the nesting turtles on a nearby beach took precedence and those who are more sympathetic to turtles than economic progress won the day, the 370 blocks were held and a mere 70 were made available.

We have a progressive company there by the name of Fortescue Metals Group that is trying to become the latest in the list of iron ore exporters and is frustrated by the lack of accommodation. We have a set of circumstances where a state government, with no motivation to analyse what is happening outside the suburbs of Perth, are the cause of restricting prosperity in the Pilbara. They are restricting the opportunities for people to live in the Pilbara and contribute to the economic mining boom that is happening in Australia today.

Recently a crowd from Kalgoorlie, some 1,600 kilometres away, had to buy the 110-year-old Esplanade Hotel, a tourism icon, because they have a number of employees on contract in Port Hedland. A hotel

that has been a watering hole for generations of Pilbarites is now no longer licensed because it has been taken up to use as accommodation. The managing director of Gould Transport, Doug Gould, tried to buy land and housing, but every time a lease came up the price became so excessive that it was out of reasonable reach.

This is having the greatest impact on the service industries. With the price they are receiving for ore, the mining companies can afford to pay top dollar to buy up existing properties and convert them into accommodation. But those people who are stacking shelves in Coles, driving taxis or loading aircraft do not have the luxury of company funded houses. They do not have the luxury of paying through the nose for the housing that is available, and so service industries are closing down. That is not the sort of situation a government wants. The state government are supposedly very concerned with state prosperity and creation of jobs, but, when you put their processes and their attitudes under the magnifying glass, you find that they took their eyes off the ball and have been caught wanting.

One of the solutions that has been talked about locally for some years now, since 2004 in fact, is that of the Port Hedland detention centre. It used to be the Newman Mining single person's quarters. It was bought by the federal government some years ago when accommodation was urgently required for unannounced arrivals—boat people, illegal immigrants, call them what you like—and it operated as a detention centre for a number of years. In 2004 the centre was closed because of the effectiveness of our border protection policies. Those people smugglers stopped plying their inhuman trade and the detention centre was no longer required on an ongoing basis.

It was a great source of frustration for local people in the Pilbara, because they saw a 400-bed facility that could go a long way to easing the accommodation problem. However, when I first inquired of the minister all those years ago it was quite rightly pointed out that, even though we had good intelligence and strong border protection, we did not know when an emergency would arise that would require those facilities for the accommodation of detainees.

The situation has changed somewhat, thank goodness. We have had some impact with our border protection policies. We have progressed with the construction of a purpose-built facility on Christmas Island and I am very pleased to say that on 1 February this year the previous minister, before he moved out of the portfolio, signed instructions to the department to urgently carry out a review of the status of the Port Hedland detention centre. I have written to the existing minister requesting that the review be well resourced so as to allow a speedy report and an equally speedy decision, which I sincerely hope will make a 400-bed facility available

for lease by private enterprise to ease the housing shortage. Of course, 400 beds are a drop in the ocean of the total required, but I say again how pleased I am that, before the previous minister involved moved from his portfolio, he took that very positive decision, realising just how difficult the situation was.

The situation in Port Hedland is at crisis point and I am continually urging the existing minister, Mr Andrews, to have that report tabled sooner rather than later. I have been dealing with local government, local real estate agents and employers in the Port Hedland area. They see no other solution, although I might add that one of the submissions is for what is being termed 'seatainer accommodation': stackable self-contained units that are the equivalent of a seatainer in size. Landed at about \$12,000 and made available at some \$25,000, they are sadly the most readily available solution to local accommodation problems. I am pleased to report that local government is positively considering an application for that style of accommodation to be made available in Karratha. But the wags, the media commentators and the cartoonists have had a great deal of fun with the idea of employees living in seatainers, albeit they are very well appointed and air-conditioned and have all the mod cons. The criticism locally about the delay—(*Time expired*)

#### Eating Disorders

**Ms BURKE** (Chisholm) (6.22 pm)—At the beginning of fashion week in New York, London and throughout Europe, I want to make some comments on zero-size models. Over the last couple of months, we have seen growing calls around the world to curb the use of zero-size models on catwalks, especially after the deaths last year of two South American models from anorexia nervosa. Indeed, on Saturday the Victorian Minister for Health, Bronwyn Pike, issued her own call for ultrathin models to be dropped from this year's Melbourne fashion festival. Ms Pike said the fashion industry had a responsibility not to promote extreme thinness because it does not send a good message of healthy eating and healthy lifestyle. She was correct in saying that the type of dieting involved in creating that body shape was bad for a person's health, especially in the long term.

Minister Pike was also right when she said that being underweight was just as bad as being overweight. Obsession with weight can lead to eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa and bulimia nervosa. Up to 20 per cent of people with anorexia will die. Anorexia is the third most common illness in adolescent girls and, for women aged between 15 and 24, eating disorders are among the top four leading causes of disease burden in terms of years of life lost through death and disability. Any other disease with that high a rate of morbidity would be a national cause of concern, but eating disorders get literally no attention.

Dr Vivienne Lewis, a researcher and practising clinical psychologist from the University of Canberra, in a body image and eating disorder seminar that I conducted at Parliament House last year, said that body image concerns are increasing and that negative body image affects more women than men. She said thinness was an unrealistic ideal that 99 per cent of women cannot achieve without significantly affecting their health and wellbeing. For the majority of Australian women and, to a lesser extent, men, their body image is negative. Poor body image has been found to be related to feelings of depression and can lead to eating disorders.

A recent survey conducted by the Nielsen company has revealed what 25,000 people in 45 countries said about the body size of women strutting the world's catwalks and red carpets. An overwhelming 81 per cent of online consumers agreed that female fashion models and celebrities are too thin. Nielsen found that Latin American consumers were strongly against super-skinny models, with 91 per cent of Argentineans and 89 per cent of Brazilians supporting the notion that fashion models are too thin. The online survey also found a link between perceptions of thinness among women and a country's quality of life. Australia, New Zealand, Norway and Switzerland where the fiercest critics of the fashion industry with as many as 94 per cent of those polled believing models were too thin. These countries also consistently top global rankings for having the best quality of life.

Australia and New Zealand also boast top models Elle Macpherson and Rachel Hunter, who are famous for their healthy physiques. 'These countries believe in the healthy concepts of beauty and culturally also rejected the superskinny model type that follows fashion trends,' said Mr Dodd from ACNielsen. So the majority of people out there do not want to see superthin models on our catwalks, but the fashion industry continues to run them down the catwalks. Why? They do not look natural. The clothes do not look natural on them. But somehow that is the ideal. Tragically, that ideal then gets into the heads of young, vulnerable girls in particular, and this can lead to an eating disorder, which can rob them of not only their childhood and their adolescence but indeed their life.

Eating disorders are commonly accompanied by other psychological disorders, such as depression, self-harm, suicidal behaviour, anxiety and obsessive compulsive disorders. Among children there is now a minicrisis, with children as young as eight being treated for eating disorders, and there is an increasing incidence of self-harm. This has got to be scary—we are talking about self-harm among eight-year-olds. According to a study by a researcher from Flinders University, almost half of girls aged between five and eight wish they were skinnier. Girls in kinder are experiencing body image problems. Basically, young girls in

Australians are growing up hating the way they look. Why is that? There is no doubt that media has played a significant role in this trend, but it is not alone—nor is the catwalk and fashion industry—in this. Daily, Australians are bombarded with images of thin women, and thin is portrayed as beautiful, hip and cool. Dangerously thin celebrities are portrayed as fashion icons. We need national leadership to curb this trend or I believe there will be dangerous consequences.

The Howard government must do more to curb the body image crisis and the alarming increase in eating disorders within Australia. We need more funding for the treatment of eating disorders and the education of sufferers, their families and the general community. We need a national forum on body image, drawing together the media, the fashion and advertising industries, medical professionals and school and community groups to discuss ways to curb the body image crisis. In an answer to a question on notice in September last year, the Minister for Health and Ageing said the government was not considering developing a national code of conduct on body image. Given the health crisis we are facing, this is a 'head in the sand' attitude.

The Victorian government has called for a media code of conduct on body image to be developed, and I believe a forum would be an ideal opportunity to develop this. We also need to consider a body mass index for fashion models so that ultrathin models are no longer used in fashion shows and photo shoots. Madrid Fashion Week, one of Spain's most prestigious fashion shows, is banning models who do not fall within a healthy body mass index. United Nations health experts recommend a BMI of between 18.5 and about 25, and some models can fall well below the minimum. The Spanish Association of Fashion Designers has also decided to ban models who fall below a BMI of 18.

In Milan, the fashion capital of Italy, a new catwalk code of conduct has been established to protect young models vulnerable to eating disorders and exploitation. The Academy for Eating Disorders in the United States has also called for a national code for catwalks. The academy is an organisation for eating disorder treatment, research and education of professionals. It has called for 'a global ban on the use of severely underweight models in fashion shows and in fashion magazines' and is encouraging the industry to adopt a minimum acceptable height-to-weight ratio. They have also requested that models under the age of 16 are not used. The academy says:

One such environmental factor is an emphasis on body shape and weight. Research indicates that the gap between the beauty ideal presented by the fashion industry and reality can have a negative effect on self-esteem. Many young women and men turn to dieting in an effort to live up to this beauty ideal. For those who are vulnerable, the combination of dieting and low self-esteem may lead to the development of an eating disorder.

Although the fashion industry does not directly cause eating disorders, it does contribute greatly to our culture's perception of beauty. The AED has collaborated with professional and patient/carer organizations from around the world to draft an international bill of rights, the *Worldwide Charter for Action on Eating Disorders*, for people with eating disorders and their families. The fashion industry, modeling agencies, and fashion magazine should collectively adopt the *Worldwide Charter for Action on Eating Disorders* and set terms for establishing a healthy industry.

In the United States the fashion industry has come out and said, 'No, we won't support those, but we will give nutritional guidelines to models so that they know about healthy eating.' I do not think that is sufficient. The Academy for Eating Disorders says that a guideline for the fashion industry should include:

Discouragement of all non-healthy weight control behaviours throughout the industry (e.g., self-induced vomiting, use of laxatives, diuretics and diet pills). Increased educational initiatives aimed at student models and professional models, their agents and employers to reduce the multiple health risks of various unhealthy weight control behaviors.

It is interesting to read about the food that is provided at these fashion industry events. There are trays and trays of pastries and glasses of champagne but no fruit or water, only lots of highly concentrated caffeine drinks. That is the normal diet for a whole day when these models are walking up and down. These are superthin women and we are encouraging this ideal. It is just ridiculous because it is not what the body image of a female should be. The federal government needs to show some leadership and establish a code of conduct or BMI rule here as has been done in other countries.

There is evidence that young women actively search the web for information on how to lose weight and on eating disorders. I did not realise there were things called 'pro-ana' websites until I went looking for them. If you go and look at them you will be horrified. Many websites promoting eating disorders and anorexia are set up by adolescents who have eating disorders themselves. They use the sites to discuss and reinforce their activities. Many of them say that this is a lifestyle choice and that they are in control. I have never come across another disease that has a 'pro' site where people celebrate having a disease that can lead to death. These sites feature images of 'thinspirational' models and celebrities for the purpose of maintaining and promoting eating disorders. Many photos are taken from catwalks.

Some of these sites are hosted in Australia. One site that I have previously mentioned in the parliament, hosted on ninemsn, has been removed, and I congratulate them for that. I wrote to the Attorney-General recently, asking that he reclassify these sites so that they could be banned or filtered out. He wrote back saying that:

Ultimately, it remains the responsibility of parents or guardians to make decisions about appropriate entertainment material for their children and to provide adequate supervision.

I think that is a fairly poor response. Most parents do not even know what their children are seeing on websites. I think these sites need to be reclassified and banned so that this dangerous information can be taken off the web. We need to do more. We need to set standards. We need to be out there as consumers saying that this is not the presentation of women that we need in our lives. We need genuine women walking down the catwalks. (*Time expired*)

#### **Western Australian Police Service**

##### **Reid Highway**

**Mr KEENAN** (Stirling) (6.32 pm)—I rise to grieve about the law and order situation in Western Australia, specifically in my electorate of Stirling. Local families in my electorate have all had enough of hoons, graffiti and serious antisocial behaviour, including drug dealers, in our streets and communities. It is not good enough that the Western Australian Labor government has failed to adequately protect families in Stirling through its inability to recruit and retain police officers and by axing an important anti-graffiti task force, all the while nursing record royalty revenues from the resource and property booms. It is simply a disgrace. As a local member of my community and as the local member of parliament, I say that enough is enough. I want local families in Stirling to feel safe and free from hoons, drug dealers and graffiti, and I am determined to see that the state government is held accountable, particularly when its coffers are full to record levels.

Only last week I had a number of families call my office about blatant drug deals being made from a house in their street, sometimes in full view of their children. It was not the first time it had happened. It was a tragic situation and these families felt powerless to act. The local police, who do an excellent job, are stretched to the limit, with numbers down and many officers overworked. It is shocking to learn that last year alone there were 368 resignations from the Western Australian Police Service and only 406 recruits, leaving a total of only 38 more officers on the beat in Western Australia. That is just not good enough. Already in January, 53 officers have resigned from the Western Australian Police Service, and naturally this is taking a serious toll. The police hierarchy sent out an SOS only a few weeks ago asking police officers to work an extra eight-hour shift a fortnight—a longer working week that simply must be detrimental to the health and wellbeing of officers. Although the ongoing pay dispute with the police has finally been resolved, I am surprised that it took the state government so long to realise that we needed better pay and working conditions to attract more young people into the police service. We also need to keep experienced officers in the

job and out doing what they do best: working to keep our streets safer.

The Carpenter government, which seems to spend most of its time lurching from ministerial crisis to ministerial crisis, is completely failing to provide our community with a fully resourced police service. It has failed to retain senior officers and meet its recruitment targets. I think our police and the people of Stirling deserve much better. Thankfully, hardworking police officers were able to act on the information that my office provided, and a drug raid was made at a house address late last week. However, regular patrols, street beats and community visits are pushing our uniformed officers to the limit and, until police numbers are returned to normal operating levels and they can fulfil these functions, we are leaving the people in Stirling vulnerable to crime.

It is disgraceful that the state Labor government plays with the safety of people in this way, and it is disgraceful that they have axed community programs that act to fight crime within our community, particularly within Stirling. One of the best examples of this is when they axed the effective and low-cost Graffiti Task Force. This task force was created by the Court government. It engaged both state and local governments in a united effort to tackle the problem of graffiti and it enjoyed enormous success.

Whilst it is true that graffiti is not the most serious crime a person can commit, we should not underestimate the enormous cost that it creates for the community and the enormous costs that it can create for society as a whole. We should not underestimate the effect it has on people's perceptions of lawlessness in their neighbourhood. Vandalism such as graffiti does lead to worse crimes and to a perception in the community that crime is out of control. This perception then alters people's behaviour in a negative way, particularly amongst elderly people who can become prisoners in their own homes if they perceive that going out onto the streets is not safe. I know from research that the fear of crime can sometimes be as bad as crime itself, because the fear of crime can prevent people going about their lives in a normal way, as they would expect to.

The Graffiti Task Force which was axed by the Labor government had started to bring the problem of graffiti under control. It had reduced graffiti vandalism by 50 per cent as well as diverting many young people into positive community projects. At its peak, the program encompassed 12 metropolitan councils, including the City of Stirling which covers my electorate, and undertook approximately 18,500 clean-ups per year. Labor abolished this highly successful task force in 2002, smugly shirking its responsibilities to the community and forcing the enormous costs of graffiti clean-up onto our local councils. They never explained why they killed off this successful program. The cost

of the program, which provided a coordinated and highly successful approach to tackling the problem of graffiti, was only \$400,000. This was from a government swimming in revenue as a result of the Western Australian mining and property booms. In fact, it is expected that the Carpenter government will collect an extra \$1.9 billion in this financial year and over \$2.2 billion in the next financial year. Yet Labor continues to force our councils into spending huge amounts of money on something that is rightly a state government responsibility. This money that the councils spend could be better spent on roads, recreational facilities, services or cuts to property rates. Once again, the Carpenter Labor government is not listening to the concerns of Western Australian people.

Rapid removal of graffiti is a great deterrent to would-be offenders and helps to ensure that our families and small business owners feel safe in their own neighbourhoods and in the protection of their property. The re-establishment of the Graffiti Task Force is needed to help people feel safe and to help our local governments start to put money back into where it is needed most: directly into our communities.

I believe that the electors of Stirling deserves better from the state government. I believe that they deserve to feel secure when they are in their own homes. Community safety is worth fighting for. The Howard government has continued to play its part through its funding of the National Community Crime Prevention Program. Already in my local area we have funded security cameras for important community facilities. I will continue to fight for projects within Stirling to tackle crime and lawlessness.

The heart of this problem is a state government that refuses to take responsibility for the things it was elected to do. It now lazily blames Canberra for every conceivable ill. I had hopes for Premier Carpenter, who boldly stated when he took over the job that he was going to end this tradition of Western Australian governments blaming the federal government for everything that goes wrong in Western Australia, but sadly he has not been good to his word.

Besides the problem with crime and lawlessness, I grieve particularly about the state of Reid Highway in my electorate. Because of its failure to take responsibility for building overpasses for this highway where it intersects with Mirrabooka Avenue and Alexander Drive, the state government is putting the safety of members of my community at serious risk. The state government refuses to do the job it was elected to do. Although Reid Highway is 100 per cent a state government responsibility, the state government fails to allocate the resources needed to build these much needed overpasses. Predictably, it was tempted to blame the Commonwealth for its failure, but I intend to continue to inform the people of Stirling that state

roads are 100 per cent a state government responsibility and that our community expects the state government to live up to its responsibilities. I intend to hold the Carpenter government to account for its failure to properly resource the police service and tackle law and order in Stirling and for its failure to build these much needed overpasses that continue to put the lives of people in my electorate at risk.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Barresi)**—Order! The time for the grievance debate has expired. The debate is interrupted and I put the question:

That grievances be noted.

Question agreed to.

#### **APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 3) 2006-2007**

#### **APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 4) 2006-2007**

#### **Referred to Main Committee**

**Mr BARTLETT** (Macquarie) (6.42 pm)—by leave—I move:

That, unless otherwise ordered, at the adjournment of the House for this sitting the bills stand referred to the Main Committee for further consideration.

Question agreed to.

### **BUSINESS**

#### **Rearrangement**

**Mrs DE-ANNE KELLY** (Dawson—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services) (6.43 pm)—I move:

That notices Nos 1 and 2, government business, be postponed until the next sitting.

**Mr PRICE** (Chifley) (6.43 pm)—This government business involves important changes to the standing orders. I understand why the government might be postponing these notices until a later hour or until tomorrow. However, I hope that all honourable members who might be affected by these changes will have an opportunity to express their views about these matters.

Question agreed to.

#### **TAX LAWS AMENDMENT (2006 MEASURES No. 6) BILL 2006**

#### **LAW AND JUSTICE LEGISLATION AMENDMENT (MARKING OF PLASTIC EXPLOSIVES) BILL 2006**

#### **CUSTOMS TARIFF AMENDMENT (INCORPORATION OF PROPOSALS) BILL 2006**

#### **AUSTRALIAN SECURITIES AND INVESTMENTS COMMISSION AMENDMENT (AUDIT INSPECTION) BILL 2006**

#### **Returned from the Senate**

Message received from the Senate returning the bills without amendment or request.

## COMMITTEES

### Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee

#### National Capital and External Territories Committee

##### Membership

The **DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Barresi)**—Mr Speaker has received messages from the Senate informing the House that Senator Scullion has been discharged from the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade and Senator Sandy Macdonald has been appointed a member of the committee; and Senator Carr has been discharged from the Joint Standing Committee on the National Capital and External Territories and Senator Crossin has been appointed a member of the committee.

#### STATUTE LAW REVISION BILL (No. 2) 2006

##### First Reading

Bill received from the Senate, and read a first time.

Ordered that the second reading be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

## COMMITTEES

### Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity Committee

The **DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Barresi)**—The Speaker has received the following message from the Senate:

The Senate transmits to the House of Representatives the following resolution:

That, in accordance with section 213 of the *Law Enforcement Integrity Commissioner Act 2006*, matters relating to the powers and proceedings of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity shall be as follows:

- (a) That the committee consist of 10 members, 3 members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Government Whip or Whips, 2 members of the House of Representatives to be nominated by the Opposition Whip or Whips or by any independent member, 2 senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Government in the Senate, 2 senators to be nominated by the Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and 1 senator to be nominated by any minority group or groups or independent senator or independent senators.
- (b) That every nomination of a member of the committee be notified in writing to the President of the Senate and the Speaker of the House of Representatives.
- (c) That the committee elect a member nominated by the Government Whips or the Leader of the Government in the Senate as its chair.
- (d) That the committee elect a deputy chair who shall act as chair of the committee at any time when the chair is not present at a meeting of the committee, and at any time when the chair and deputy chair are not present at a meeting of the committee the members present shall elect another member to act as chair at that meeting.

- (e) That, in the event of an equal vote on a question before the chair, the chair, or the deputy chair when acting as chair, have a casting vote.
- (f) That 3 members of the committee constitute a quorum of the committee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall include 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House.
- (g) That the committee have power to appoint subcommittees consisting of 3 or more of its members and to refer to any subcommittee any matter which the committee is empowered to examine.
- (h) That the committee appoint the chair of each subcommittee who shall have a casting vote only and at any time when the chair of a subcommittee is not present at a meeting of the subcommittee the members of the subcommittee present shall elect another member of that subcommittee to act as chair at that meeting.
- (i) That 2 members of a subcommittee constitute a quorum of that subcommittee, provided that in a deliberative meeting the quorum shall comprise 1 Government member of either House and 1 non-Government member of either House.
- (j) That members of the committee who are not members of a subcommittee may participate in the proceedings of that subcommittee but shall not vote, move any motion or be counted for the purpose of a quorum.
- (k) That the committee or any subcommittee have power to call for witnesses to attend and for documents to be produced.
- (l) That the committee or any subcommittee may conduct proceedings in any place it sees fit.
- (m) That a subcommittee have power to adjourn from time to time and to sit during any adjournment of the Senate and the House of Representatives.
- (n) That the committee may report from time to time.
- (o) That, in carrying out its duties, the committee or any subcommittee ensure that the operational methods and results of investigations of law enforcement agencies, as far as possible, be protected from disclosure where that would be against the public interest.
- (p) That the provisions of this resolution, so far as they are inconsistent with the standing orders, have effect notwithstanding anything contained in the standing orders.

The Senate requests the concurrence of the House in this resolution.

Ordered that the message be considered immediately.

**Mrs DE-ANNE KELLY** (Dawson—Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services) (6.46 pm)—I move:

That this House concurs in the resolution transmitted in the Senate message relating to the powers and proceedings of the Parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity.

**Mr PRICE** (Chifley) (6.47 pm)—In speaking to this Senate message on the powers and proceedings of the parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian

Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity, I point out that the view of the opposition in the Senate was that perhaps there was an existing joint parliamentary committee whose powers might be extended to encompass the remit of this new committee. However, overwhelmingly the opposition there and in this place welcomes the extra scrutiny that will be provided by this new committee.

I ask the Parliamentary Secretary to the Minister for Transport and Regional Services—although, strictly speaking, it is not her responsibility, so I may need to ask you, Mr Deputy Speaker Barresi, to take this up with the Speaker—which chamber will be supporting this particular committee. It has been the practice of the Howard government when creating new parliamentary committees not to increase the staffing and appropriations that support parliamentary committees. As I have said, we believe that this parliamentary committee is an important one. We believe that the extra scrutiny that it will provide is very important and necessary, and we totally support it, but I seek clarification from the parliamentary secretary or, alternatively, if the parliamentary secretary cannot assist the House, from the Speaker which chamber will be supporting the committee and to reassure all honourable members that there will be net additional resources provided to support this committee in its work. As I said, in the House we have seen three committees established but no extra staffing and no extra budget provided to support the work of those three committees. That the committee system is working well at all is a testament to what I would call, with no disrespect, the stretched staff of parliamentary committees.

Additionally, I point out to the House that there has never, ever been a review conducted by a committee of this chamber looking at the staffing and appropriations of parliamentary committees. I know, Mr Deputy Speaker, that you have just concluded a long-term chairmanship of a parliamentary committee—

**Mr Cadman**—A very good one, too.

**Mr PRICE**—Indeed—and hold the role of parliamentary committees very seriously. I acknowledge that under your chairmanship that committee has always taken a bipartisan approach, which is a compliment to you as chair, to your deputy chair and to all members of the committee. I would hope that you share my interest in ascertaining which chamber will be supporting this new committee and ensuring that it has adequate new net resources to discharge its new and most serious responsibility.

I remind the House that this is the parliamentary Joint Committee on the Australian Commission for Law Enforcement Integrity—a very important new innovation and a net addition to the committee system. We want it to do its job well, but we do not want it to suffer because of stretched resources or an inadequate

budget and do a perfunctory job. As much as we would say how important the members of the committee are to a successful parliamentary committee, it goes without saying that having top committee staff and an adequate budget are fundamental to a successful committee. If you could clear that matter up, Mr Deputy Speaker, I would be most grateful.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Barresi)**—I thank the Chief Opposition Whip and ensure him that there are many in this chamber who take the committee system very seriously. I will ensure that the Speaker is well aware of not only the questions but also the concerns expressed by the Chief Opposition Whip on behalf of many in this place. I am sure that the Speaker will reply in his usual way.

Question agreed to.

### **APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 3) 2006-2007**

Cognate bill:

### **APPROPRIATION BILL (NO. 4) 2006-2007**

#### **Second Reading**

Debate resumed from 8 February, on motion by **Mr Nairn**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Mr TANNER** (Melbourne) (6.52 pm)—Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2006-2007 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2006-2007 before the parliament this evening continue a now well-entrenched pattern on the part of the Howard government for ever-growing wasteful spending. Over the past few years we have seen the government engage in a giant spending spree that has essentially been built on the enormous boost to Australia's national income that has derived from the minerals boom. The Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook papers published a month or two ago indicated that there is no respite in sight from the ever-growing largess that the government is spraying around, wastefully in many instances. Certainly the appropriations legislation this evening follows the same pattern.

The government is still squandering these dividends of prosperity. It is not investing for Australia's long-term future and, in particular, it is misusing its authority as the government of the nation to spend money in a variety of ways that are designed purely to win political support for the government, to reward its supporters, and to calm the nerves of particular interest groups but not to serve the longer-term interests of the nation. It is true to say that all governments to varying degrees do these kinds of things. No government is pure. I certainly would not assert that former Labor governments have been pure in that regard. However, the Howard government has set new world records in the misuse of public money for political purposes, leaving whatever transgressions we may accuse former Labor governments of very much in the shade in terms of significance and scale.

We have seen a pattern going all the way back to 1996 but gradually gathering steam in the last few years. It began with things like the Natural Heritage Trust and moved on to the Centenary of Federation Fund, then to Networking the Nation and more recently to Regional Partnerships. The pattern is the same. The pattern is that there is essentially no wider strategic purpose for the spending, no clear set of objectives for the nation and no clear set of guidelines or principles against which subsequent results can be measured. It is a pattern of frittering away the very large sums of money involved on small-scale projects or consultants' reports or activities. There is no proper mechanism for assessing on a cost-benefit basis whether or not these individual projects, consultants' reports or activities are worth while and, ultimately, at the conclusion of the funding, it is effectively impossible to determine what degree of national benefit was actually derived from this expenditure.

The famous Auditor-General's inquiry into the Networking the Nation program, which was worth roughly half a billion dollars, said it all. The Auditor-General found that it was impossible to determine whether or not any public benefit had transpired because there were no benchmarks, no guidelines and no wider strategic set of objectives against which the outcomes from the program could be measured.

In the 2006 budget this pattern was repeated. The 2006 budget was overflowing with political handouts. We saw \$15 million handed over to the Melbourne Cricket Club—an organisation that has historically not been short of a quid—for a sports museum. We saw \$53 million committed to an advertising campaign to tell Australians about the benefits of private health insurance. One wonders why the appellation 'private' is applied to the sector when the government feels obliged to pick up its advertising bills! And we saw a vast array of small grants, many of them made in the financial year that was about to end. In other words, the government had determined that it had enough of a surplus in the kitty to be able to spray a proportion of it around in lots of little grants. Some of them were in such enormously high priorities as financing a tour to India of Sir Donald Bradman memorabilia! There is a long list of these kinds of programs that the government has been financing.

There is a particularly instructive table in the 2006 budget papers which I have drawn to the House's attention before. From memory it is Budget Paper No. 2, page 14, but do not hold me to that. It outlines parameter and policy changes—revenue and expenditure changes—compared with the previous year's Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook estimates, which of course came out in the preceding December. In other words, it outlines the six-month change in the estimate of government revenue and expenditure compared

since the end of 2005. For the three financial years including 2006-07 and thereafter, the government found in the budget that it was going to be \$41 billion better off than it had previously estimated only six months earlier. But, amazingly enough, it decided that it was going to increase its effective spending, be it through tax cuts or additional expenditure, by \$42 billion. So it effectively used all of the additional revenue that was available to it as a result of increased national income from the minerals boom and more.

The most scandalous thing about this was that only about 1.3 per cent of this additional bonanza that was available to the government went into investment in the skills of our people. Only about 1.3 per cent of that \$41 billion-odd was added to our national effort to educate our people, to improve the skills of our people, to give our kids a better opportunity in life and to ensure that we have a better base for improvements in productivity in Australia.

When we look at the more recent budget documents to see where the government has been heading in more recent times, the picture is the same. The end of 2006 Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook papers indicate that for the same three years government spending estimates have increased by \$8.6 billion. When compared with where they were only six months or so previously, you see they have added another \$8.6 billion to spending. It is true that a very substantial portion of that additional spending relates to things that are critically important, such as drought relief and various additions to the PBS such as Herceptin. But what is missing of course are cuts in spending in other areas. Rather than reducing spending in areas of lower priority and rather than acquiring some degree of sobriety and restraint with respect to the way that the government deals with public funds and the way it hands these moneys out to various groups in the community, the government has simply added on that new spending, however crucial. There have been no significant cuts in spending in other areas.

Since the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook papers, we have seen the government's much-touted \$10 billion program for the Murray-Darling Basin. We know that the inception of this program did not involve the departments of treasury and finance. We know that the financial statement that was associated with the announcement was a single page. There have probably been few occasions in political history when so much money has been committed with such a small amount of backup material. We know that there is no explanation of the timing of any expenditure over the purported 10-year period. We know that there is no information about whether any of this money is going to be disbursed in loans rather than grants. We know it is unclear precisely which rivers and tributaries will be involved. We know it is unclear whether town water



supplies in the Murray-Darling Basin will be taken over by Canberra. We know it is unclear whether the planning functions that are now performed by the states and local government with regard to the farm use of water will be taken over by the federal government. All of these things are left hanging, yet there is a notional commitment of \$10 billion of taxpayers' money to this purported program.

What I find most extraordinary is that if you look at the alleged span of the program, 10 years, what in effect is happening is that the Prime Minister is making financial commitments that come into play when he will be 77 years old. I doubt that even he believes he will still be in the Prime Minister's position then. If these moneys are spent wisely on the rehabilitation of the great Murray-Darling system, returning it to more robust environmental health, that will be to the good. But, given the track record of the Howard government of squandering vast sums of public money on pork-barrelling—paying off its National Party mates and trying to win votes in marginal seats through things like Networking the Nation, Regional Partnerships and the Centenary of Federation Fund—it is hard to have any confidence. In particular, given that the financial statement associated with this commitment is a mere one page it is hard to have any confidence that good outcomes will emerge. It is particularly hard to have any confidence that the taxpayer will get value for money. With \$10 billion, the odds are that, no matter how badly squandered some of the money is, there will be some good outcomes, but what we will not get are efficient outcomes; what we will not get is good value for money for Australian taxpayers.

We have seen a similar pattern with the recent superannuation announcement. The government's tally of the take for this commitment has already blown out by a billion dollars and the government has consistently refused to disaggregate the financial analysis to provide genuine details of the impact of the superannuation changes that it is making. Again we have the same pattern: huge commitments of money and minimal information and minimal capacity on the part of the general community to assess whether this is a sensible use of taxpayers' money.

The OECD estimates that the change in the terms of trade that Australia has recently experienced has brought somewhere in the vicinity of an extra \$17 billion a year to the budget bottom line. That is close to double the magnitude of the budget surplus. Although the Howard government—the Treasurer and the Prime Minister, in particular—regularly pat themselves on the back for running strong surpluses, this information indicates that they are doing so in circumstances where it would be extremely difficult to run a deficit. To run a deficit in the current financial circumstances that this nation faces would require profligacy of truly hercu-

lean proportions. So much for the notion that somehow this is a government of great financial restraint! When the government has money raining down on it, when the massive increase in mineral prices and the massive increase in demand in China, India and elsewhere is putting enormous amounts of money into government coffers—\$17 billion, according to the OECD, every year—it would be very difficult for it to not be running a surplus.

The ANZ Bank's Chief Economist, Saul Eslake, estimates that between 2002-03 and 2009-10 the impact of the minerals boom will add a total of roughly \$283 billion in additional revenue to the government's coffers. That is a huge sum of money over that period of seven or eight financial years. He concludes that very little of long-term significance for the Australian economy has emerged from this. In other words, the bulk of the vast largesse that wider external circumstances have been raining down on the government has been squandered. The amazing thing is that the Howard government's key figures—the Prime Minister, the Treasurer and the finance minister—actually think that it is tough. They think that they are a really tough, fiscally conservative government. Those tired, toothless, mangy old labradors that are guarding the public purse think they are rottweilers. They are not, and there are a couple of simple illustrations that will demonstrate that.

It is interesting that, in an opinion piece in the *Australian* a week or so ago, Senator Minchin said that federal government spending as a proportion of GDP is actually lower than it was in the mid 1980s. He claimed that this was somehow a demonstration of great fiscal restraint and rectitude. It is interesting that he chose the mid 1980s. I think the reason is pretty simple. When you look at the statistics for government spending as a percentage of GDP, what you see is that in the latter part of the mid 1980s, around 1986, post the banana republic incident, the Hawke government seriously cut into public expenditure in Australia and got it back on track so that in 1989-90 federal government spending as a proportion of GDP was 22.4 per cent. When you do the adjustment for the GST package and the fact that the financial assistance grants are no longer being paid to the states, and get a like-for-like comparison, the latest figure for the completed financial year of 2005-06 is 24 per cent. The importance of this comparison is that we are at roughly a comparable stage of the economic cycle now as we were in the late 1980s. There are a number of similarities with the wider economic circumstances, except that the Howard government was not then in the middle of a minerals boom and the terms of trade circumstances were much adverse to Australia.

Federal government spending is now 1½ per cent higher as a proportion of GDP than it was under Bob

Hawke in the late eighties. What does that translate to in dollars? Percentages are fine but they are a bit abstract. I will tell you what it translates into in dollars, Mr Deputy Speaker. If government spending as a proportion of GDP were at the same level as it was under Bob Hawke in 1989-90, it would be \$16 billion lower than it currently is—this from a government that purports to be a government of great fiscal restraint and rectitude, small government and minimal intervention in the economy.

We only have to ask a simple rhetorical question to emphasise this point: when was the last razor gang? When was the last time we saw a serious attempt to cut into waste, to cut into spending, to cut into programs, to cut into administration? The answer is: it was a very long time ago. In fact, it was at the outset of the Howard government. There were just under 140,000 public servants when the Howard government came to office. In its first year in office it hacked into that number pretty savagely—it got it down to about 110,000—many of them people who should not have been removed. Now the total number of people on the Public Service payroll in this country is almost back to the level it was when the Howard government took office.

But that is not all, because approximately 25 per cent of those nearly 140,000 people—it is in the mid to high 130,000s—are at the executive level, the senior management level. The proportion 10 years or so ago was 13 per cent. What has happened is the government have expanded the Public Service back out to where it was but with one important caveat, and that is that there are fewer workers, fewer people actually delivering services on the ground, and a lot more chiefs, a lot more fat cats, a lot more people at the top end earning very high salaries.

But there is another difference, and that is that the amount of money being expended by the government on consultants has ballooned enormously. It is now over \$360 million a year. In most cases they are consultants doing work that previously was done by public servants. What is happening is that departments are able to double dip. They are getting more and more money whenever there is a need for some kind of new program, new administrative activity, new infrastructure, new IT system or whatever. Rather than internal efficiencies and belt-tightening financing these changes, departments and agencies just put their hands out and the government hands over the money.

You will see a number of these kinds of things even in the Mid-Year Economic and Fiscal Outlook, including \$12 million for the establishment of a thing called Digital Australia to somehow make sense out of the convoluted mess that is the government's digital television policy, when there is a substantial staff and resources in the department that should be able to do that work. The list goes on: additional resources to the tax

office, additional resources to ASIC, additional resources for electronic authentication of form filling—all the kinds of things that should be financed from existing resources. A Future Fund advisory unit—why can't the Department of Finance and Administration's existing resources cover the cost of that? There is an endless list where the government is simply handing out more money for its own purposes. So not only is it giving more money to its own supporters to win political support; it has taken its eye off the ball in its own backyard as well. It is allowing more and more fat to creep into the public sector and less and less valuable output.

It is interesting that in a submission to a Senate inquiry recently the government's former head of the budget division of the Department of Finance and Administration—in effect the second most important person in the department of finance—Professor Stephen Bartos, argued that departments are now effectively able to double dip. That is because they are funded for depreciation—they get a regular annual appropriation relating to depreciation—but they are also coming back to the central government seeking more money for particular new projects like IT projects. He cites as an example the customs department IT project which we all know so well. In effect, the government is giving them two lots of money for the same thing: depreciation on an annual basis and new grants or new appropriations from time to time when specific projects come up.

So the claim by the Minister for Finance and Administration that this government is tough, fiscally rigorous and financially responsible is simply laughable. The real tragedy for the people of this country is the waste that is occurring and the misallocation of priorities. The figure of 24 per cent of GDP is by itself not particularly objectionable. I have no particular objection to that figure per se; the question is what the money is being used for. That is the real tragedy. While the government cuts back on investment in our universities, while training languishes, while infrastructure languishes, while the drivers of long-term prosperity, the things that will ultimately determine how well our children live, are neglected, money is spent on consultants, on government advertising—which is now running at 2½ times the highest rate that Labor ever achieved—and on paying off National Party mates and other assorted odds and sods in marginal seats for political purposes.

Even when the government do finally try to do something about a key issue of long-term significance to the future of this country—and, to be fair, they do from time to time—it is an extraordinary coincidence: it always seems to be in an election year. It always seems to be about six months from the polls when suddenly they discover water, for example, and suddenly there is a loose \$10 billion lying around to be waved

about for a great headline and a great TV shot. Suddenly they have discovered aged care. The Hogan report was not last week; it was not last month; I do not think it was even last year. But suddenly they have discovered aged care. We will have a close look at some of the initiatives—and our response is essentially positive: good, more resources for aged care—but why is it that they have to wait until six months before an election before they suddenly discover that an issue is important and we need to put resources into it? Why is it that so often it is on the back of a serviette after a long lunch that somebody scribbles out a grand \$10 billion plan for water or something like that? Why is it that we do not put serious effort, serious capability, into solving the nation's real long-term problems rather than doing it in a knee-jerk political way when the threat of electoral retribution emerges?

These scarce taxpayers' dollars are crucial, and while they are raining on the government through the minerals boom it is more important than ever that they be used properly. Our agenda is very clear and very transparent: we want to spend more on the drivers of long-term prosperity for our nation. We want to invest more in our people, more in our skills and more in our infrastructure—more in the things that will set Australia up for long-term prosperity. Where is that money going to come from? It is going to come from waste; it is going to come from misallocation of priorities; it is going to come from misuse of government money under the Howard government.

Why are these issues so important? They are important because productivity has stalled. Labour productivity in particular is a major problem. Compared with American productivity we have gone backwards. We were at about 86 per cent compared with US productivity in 1998; we are now down to below 80 per cent, and over the last year or two in some areas productivity has gone backwards. Yet the government claims that the Australian economy is zooming along because of Work Choices. Work Choices was supposed to deliver great improvements in productivity in the workplace. The government is happy to claim the unemployment statistics which are largely driven by the vast amounts of money being pushed into the Australian economy from the minerals boom. It is happy to claim good unemployment numbers as being the product of its Work Choices legislation. You do not hear members of the government talk about productivity and Work Choices, though. You do not hear them say, 'Oh, isn't it wonderful, productivity in Australia is improving and Work Choices is the reason.' The simple explanation for that is that productivity is not improving in Australia; it is going backwards—it is seriously inferior to where it was in the 1990s. They cannot have it both ways. The reality is we have a major problem in productivity. It is driven by longer term considerations, such as the lack of investment in skills, and Work Choices, instead of

being a solution to the problem, is actually exacerbating it. And the inability of the government to seriously resolve Australia's appalling problem with broadband, for example, is just one of a number of public policy areas where it has failed Australians in this regard.

Labor's commitment is to address the real problems that the Australian economy faces, such as the fact that we are the only developed nation where public expenditure on education has been going backwards in the last decade. We have a huge problem with plummeting enrolments in science and maths subjects that is already having a major detrimental effect on our wider economy and will further damage our economy. We spend 0.1 per cent of GDP on early childhood education compared with the OECD average of 0.5 per cent. In so many areas our economic infrastructure is declining and crumbling.

The Howard government's response to these problems is pretty straightforward. First, there is the blame game: it is always the fault of the state governments. In fact the previous speaker, on the grievance debate, was saying precisely that. Second, there are the electoral gimmicks, the pork-barrelling and the grand plans that are written on the back of a serviette after a long lunch. Third, there are the strategic electoral announcements—the big-spending announcements that we have got used to seeing in the election budget and the pre-election period from the Howard government after it had ignored the issue for many years.

Labor is going to take a consistent, considered, serious and sober approach to dealing with the big issues that face this nation. We are not going to be announcing gimmicks. We will not be into stunts. We will just have considered policies that are there to tackle the things that ultimately will determine how well Australians live and what kinds of opportunities our children will have in the future—things like the quality of our early childhood education, the standard of our universities and the opportunities for people to get good technical education and skills.

We are also going to tackle the creeping problem of excessive secrecy and deceit about financial information in the Howard government, something that rarely gets much media coverage but is fundamentally important to ensuring that we get good governance and good financial management in this country. So we will properly enforce the outcomes framework to ensure that money cannot just be switched around from one budget item to another. We will publish detailed forward estimates that connect between the budget papers and the portfolio budget statements so that people can actually see the detailed projections for where future government spending is going to be. We will require full reporting of special accounts, where more and more money is being salted away. We will require the establishment of a register of standing appropriations, which

now cover almost 80 per cent of total government expenditure. We will require more detail in the forward estimates of tax expenditures—things like fringe benefits tax concessions and the like—so that people are able to understand the priorities of the government and why a particular tax concession exists, how much it costs and what public policy interest it serves. We will provide more detail with respect to the contingency reserve and how that is used.

We will require mandatory reporting over 40 years for new policy initiatives that are susceptible to demographic change, such as the government's superannuation package, so that the longer term financial implications of new policies can be properly examined. And we will reform the notorious Charter of Budget Honesty so that opposition parties will be able to get costings done on a confidential basis for proposed policies for a period of 12 months prior to the election—which is an arrangement that exists in other countries, such as the United Kingdom and Ireland—and they will be able to deal directly and confidentially with the heads of the two relevant departments, Treasury and Finance, rather than having to deal through the government of the day.

Put together, all of these reforms will amount to a major improvement in transparency of fiscal arrangements. Media representatives, parliamentary representatives and the general community will be able to get a much better idea of where the money is going and what is happening to it. It has been no coincidence that over the last 10 years, when the waste and the pork-barrelling and the misuse of government money for the purposes of political outcomes have been mounting, the level of disclosure of detailed financial information has been diminishing dramatically. That is because they do not want you to know. That is because they are embarrassed with where the money is going. That is because they want to cover up what they have been doing so that they do not get genuine public debate about where the money should go.

Australia's economy is, in overall terms, relatively strong. Its growth rate could be better. It is now projected to be about 2.5 per cent, and some of that decline is of course due to the drought but there are other factors as well. But, the government and indeed the wider community are getting enormous benefit from the minerals boom. And it is not just the people employed directly in the minerals sector, as the Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations seemed to suggest in question time today. The money that is coming into Australia is flowing through all sectors indirectly and it is the ultimate reason why unemployment is so low. But we need to make use of that money to invest prudently for the future, not just to have a big party now like the government is doing. We need to invest so that we will have higher growth rates and

surplus budgets into the future. We will be cutting into wasteful spending so that we can finance investment for our long-term future. We need to end the complacency, the self-congratulation, the arrogance and the hubris that characterise this government's presentation of its economic management policy. I move:

That all words after "That" be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

"whilst not declining to give the bill a second reading, the House is of the view that:

- (1) despite record high commodity prices the Government has failed to secure Australia's long term economic fundamentals and that it should be condemned for its failure to:
  - (a) stem the widening current account deficit and trade deficit;
  - (b) reverse the reduction in education and training investment;
  - (c) acknowledge the connection between climate change and human activity and tackle the serious threat climate change poses to Australia's long-term well-being;
  - (d) address critical structural weaknesses in health such as workforce shortages and rising costs;
  - (e) expand and encourage research and development to move Australian industry and exports up the value-chain; and
  - (f) address falling levels of workplace productivity; and
- (2) the Government's extreme industrial relations laws will lower wages and conditions for many workers and do nothing to enhance productivity or economic growth; and
- (3) the Government's Budget documents fail the test of transparency and accountability".

*(Time expired)*

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Barresi)**—Is the amendment seconded?

**Mr Ripoll**—I second the amendment and reserve my right to speak.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**—The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Melbourne has moved as an amendment that all words after 'That' be omitted with a view to substituting other words. The question now is that the words proposed to be omitted stand part of the question.

**Mr CADMAN (Mitchell) (7.23 pm)**—The member for Melbourne was so busy giving a spray to everything far and wide that he almost forgot to move his own amendment. I am delighted he has moved it because it covers some of the things he spoke about but not everything. It was a typical speech; interesting to hear—gloom and doom but the Labor Party is going to fix it all. Well, I have news for the honourable member.

In the Treasury's *Economic Roundup* for summer 2007 all the things the member for Melbourne claimed to be happening appear to have vanished. An analysis of the Australian economy shows that the market value of Australian net private sector wealth is almost \$7.5 trillion or around \$360,000 per Australian. Wealth has increased by 19 per cent in one year or 15 per cent after allowing for inflation. The *Economic Roundup* indicates that Australia's infrastructure policy and the national reform agenda are delivering real results for all Australians. These reforms may have increased the average Australians household income by \$7,000 a year. This is far from the doom and gloom that Hanrahan opposite proclaims.

The examination of evidence on the childcare market, for instance, shows that, contrary to popular perception, there is not an emerging crisis in the childcare sector. From a variety of sources and data, including survey and income based data, it has been demonstrated that supply is generally keeping pace with demand and that child care has remained affordable. I know that in my area that proposition is borne out. Across Sydney there are some areas of shortage and some areas of oversupply. That is the Treasury *Economic Roundup* for summer 2007. Things are on track.

I will take a few brief moments to highlight some of the areas raised by Treasury in its *Economic Roundup*. Firstly, infrastructure was looked at. The Treasury document says:

State governments retain constitutional responsibility for most energy and transport infrastructure policies while the Commonwealth Government is responsible for telecommunications policy and some economic regulation of infrastructure through the Trade Practices Act.

I think that is a worthy note to take into account when one looks at a report that deals with investment as a percentage of gross domestic product and which deals with the way in which investment is taking place in infrastructure, both public and private.

A snapshot of the national competition policy or its successor, the national reform agenda, indicates that there are three streams where we need to improve competitive markets in key infrastructure sectors. Competition in energy, for instance, needs to be strengthened, and more efficient energy use and investment needs to be encouraged in the natural electricity market. There needs to be increased efficiency in land transport pricing, planning and regulation. Infrastructure regulation and planning to promote a simpler and more consistent national approach need to take place. We can see that the government is working on that. The government has, in a number of areas, made advances in better infrastructure regulation and planning. Water policy is one of those. Changes to Australian rail transport and road transport over the last

few years have seen endeavours to bring the states along in a cooperative manner to make improvements.

As far as regulation is concerned, the national reform agenda indicates that we need to be promoting best practice by strengthening gatekeeping for new regulations. Do not allow something through the gate unless it is absolutely essential. We also need to reduce the regulatory burden, focusing initially on 10 identified hotspots. As far as human capital is concerned, the national reform agenda indicates that early childhood services need continuing improvement, although there is not the nationally perceived undersupply. Diabetes is the main target as far as health outcomes are concerned. Literacy and numeracy for students is a target, as are childcare outcomes and encouraging a more congenial workforce arrangement for families, particularly families with young children. The *Economic Roundup* identifies a range of areas where there is state responsibility and where there is improvement and a cooperative arrangement being established by the Commonwealth to work with the states.

Looking at the change in the economy and the need for attention to certain details, I looked at a number of sources. First of all I went to the Business Council of Australia to look at their budget submission for 2007-08. That report is titled *Passing on prosperity*. I thought it was a very good title because the Business Council of Australia comprises major Australian enterprises and the title reflects their concept of making sure we are passing on prosperity. Have they got a self-interest? Of course they have. But what does that interest have to encompass? It has to encompass some benefit for all Australians and particularly the Australian workforce. The Business Council above all knows that the workforce is reducing and ageing and those two factors must somehow be managed to continue to produce the exceptional results we have seen over the last 10 years.

Among the key priorities identified by the Business Council of Australia for 2007 is:

A commitment to business tax reform consistent with ongoing competitiveness and intergenerational fiscal requirements.

This is pretty standard probably for all business organisations, but it is an argument that has some merit in that the individual tax system must reflect the business tax system so that there is no encouragement to artificially arrange affairs to take advantage of either a lower personal income tax or a lower business income tax. There is merit in those arguments and they are constantly being examined.

The second major point brought forward by the Business Council of Australia for 2007 is a need for:

A demonstrated improvement in federal-state relations and the establishment of new policy infrastructure that provides the capacity for governments to anticipate and respond to

current and future challenges in a cooperative, efficient and effective way.

I would have to say that generally the current federal government has been successful in the areas it has tackled. On some occasions there has been concern expressed by various levels of government. New South Wales, above all other governments, seems to drag the chain in agreement. Queensland seems to be first in assessing the needs of their state, the growth that is taking place in that state and the need for a cooperative arrangement, and I am pleased that that is the case. In my own home state I would urge the government of New South Wales to be more forward-looking and better planned and to seek to move away from the brink of recession and a budget deficit. It has a housing sector crisis on its hands and a water crisis which is not being dealt with.

If one looks further at the capacity to do these things, one has to look at the changes that have taken place over the period of just 10 to 20 years for Australians at large. If one looks at the gross domestic product per capita—that is, how much do we as a nation earn and divide it by the number of people in Australia—in 1990 Australia ranked 17th in the world for income per capita. Luxembourg, Switzerland, the United States and Norway headed the list and we were down at No. 17, slightly ahead of the United Kingdom and New Zealand and just behind Germany and Italy.

At the moment we are No. 5 behind Luxembourg, the US, Norway and Ireland. Behind us are Switzerland and Iceland, and way down the list at No. 12 are the UK, with Japan at No. 13, and Canada at No. 15. Australia is now fifth in the GDP per capita ranking according to the OECD. That sustained long growth and careful financial management have meant that Australia on an international basis is doing extremely well. Can we do better? Of course we can. Do we need to apply ourselves to climb higher and do better? Of course we need to do that. One would be foolish to say that it is possible to stay at this level of success without wanting to aspire to do even better.

One of the things that concerns me is the way in which we relate to the states. The dog-in-the-manger attitude of the government of New South Wales is a very concerning matter to me. NSW is the most populous state and perhaps it should be the most progressive state in Australia, yet it appears to have gone to sleep. It has failed to make all the changes necessary to run a successful state and a successful economy. It appears that the government has gone to sleep and is not prepared to do anything but manage crises.

As for the priorities set forward for the state by another organisation of which I am fond, the New South Wales Business Chamber, are they harsh on business? No. I think that New South Wales businesses are generally hardworking. They tend to be small businesses,

though there are some large businesses. We do not have the mining sector or car manufacturers in New South Wales. We have got some great businesses, but they are medium and smaller businesses generally. New South Wales indeed has a challenge ahead of it.

The five major areas of challenge as outlined by the Business Chamber are ones that I have noticed and have established in my own mind as being important. There is a need for a growing and dynamic workforce. The workforce in New South Wales is declining. There has been a large migration out of the state to such a degree that New South Wales has lost one federal electorate. That electorate has been moved to Queensland, and I know that the following speakers will want to mention how successful Queensland is. That movement of population is partly due to climate and partly due to the lack of opportunity, challenge and innovation that is exhibited in New South Wales.

There is a need to strengthen the performance of state government. New South Wales is not staying competitive, and that should be another target of the state. There is a strong, long overdue need to renew economic infrastructure—such things as electricity and transport, which are a state responsibility. Water supply is another one. The state needs to have a plan and a projected goal in order to change the economic infrastructure to meet the needs and challenges of climate change. Whether it is man-made or long-term or whether it is part of the cyclical thing that we are used to in Australia with the dry and wet conditions coming and going and the impact of El Nino on our climate in the eastern states, climate change is a challenge that must be faced. The cause has not been determined. It is a matter of conflict among scientists as to what degree the drought is affecting circumstances and to what degree climate change is doing so.

The executive summary of the New South Wales Business Chamber's report, *NSW business priorities 2007*, deals with the challenges facing New South Wales. The first is the need to grow a dynamic workforce. There are 47,000 job vacancies in New South Wales at the moment. People have said that there is a huge need for a bigger workforce in the mining sector, but there is also a huge need for a bigger workforce in New South Wales. The report says that demographic changes are cutting the size of the workforce: as younger people tend to move to other states for greater opportunities, of course the life of the current workforce in New South Wales is diminishing. There are significant skill shortages in the public sector and in regional New South Wales. There is also a falling apprenticeship completion rate, and it is the lowest in Australia. The Commonwealth government has done a great deal to rectify this through the establishment of the Australian technical colleges. They alone will produce some significant results. But the problem is not

drawing the response that I would like to see from educational services in New South Wales. They should respond with a more flexible and more relevant apprenticeship and skills training program.

The report says that there is a strong need to continue to support the Council of Australian Governments national reform agenda—that is, the need for the Commonwealth and all state governments ‘to remove structural impediments that exist across the workforce’. The states can do this only by committing themselves strongly to work with the Commonwealth under the Work Choices legislation. The dog-in-the-manger attitude of passing legislation that would try to drag conditions around the area of juniors’ wages and the way the workforce operates back to that of 20 years ago is something that needs to change. There needs to be support for national recognition of qualifications in terms of occupational licensing and skills assessment. These are things that need to be dealt with by the New South Wales government and not set to one side.

The executive summary also says there is a need to ‘link ministerial responsibility to agreed performance measures’ and to ‘repeal legislation exempting public servants from Work Choices’—a silly thing to have done. The fact of the matter is that New South Wales should be leading the way instead of hanging back in areas of legislative change affecting both the public and private sectors. The section 94 contributions to New South Wales local governments should not be stored up; they need to be put to use to provide benefits for the communities in New South Wales.

According to the New South Wales Business Chamber, one of the challenges to New South Wales’s ability to stay competitive is the negative economic growth we are experiencing in that state. Even Tasmania is doing better than New South Wales. We are at the bottom of the list. Tasmania is a lovely state with few resources, but just the hard work and commitment of the people of that state means that it is performing better than the state of New South Wales. A further challenge is that unemployment in New South Wales is worse than the rest of Australia. Then there is the migration drain: as I have already mentioned, the migration drain to other states is costing us people of great skill and ability. Talk about the brain drain overseas—it is going on within Australia. There needs to be greater competition between New South Wales and the other states. They need to be able to compare themselves with each other and benchmark against the best.

New South Wales also has the highest level of state and local government taxation anywhere in Australia. Compared with any other state, people in New South Wales are taxed more heavily at both a state and a local government level. There has been significant growth in payroll tax, and one only has to look at the tables in the report to see that the cost of doing business in New

South Wales is extremely high. We lack competitiveness. In a survey conducted of business, the bulk of replies indicated that there was a strong view that New South Wales was performing very poorly. In fact, the survey conducted for the report indicates that, in response to the question, ‘How effectively has the government managed the cost of doing business,’ 96 per cent of respondents answered ‘poorly’, ‘not very effectively’ or ‘neutral’. Only four per cent of respondents thought that the New South Wales government was managing this ‘effectively’ or ‘very effectively’. Ninety-six per cent felt that the government was managing the cost of business poorly or failed to make a comment.

In response to a question about the New South Wales government’s management of infrastructure, on the subject of roads, 91 per cent of respondents indicated it had managed them badly; on public transport, 94 per cent said badly; on water infrastructure, 96 per cent said badly or failed to make a comment of any strength; and, on energy infrastructure, 90 per cent felt New South Wales was doing poorly. I think this is a very poor record, and one that ought to change. Under the national reform agenda, New South Wales needs to be pulling its weight in a much more effective way than it has in the past.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. DJC Kerr)**—I thank the honourable member and I particularly thank him for his kind words about the great state of Tasmania.

**Mr RIPOLL (Oxley) (7.44 pm)**—The government has been in power for almost 11 years and, in anyone’s language, that is a long time. It is a long time for any government to be in power. It is enough time for a government to implement its policy; it is enough time for those policies to be well known to the community. Of course, the expectation from everybody in the community is that after 10, nearly 11, years there should no longer be any excuses from government either in program delivery or for any associated failures with its own program schedule. Unfortunately, that is exactly what we get from the Howard government: a string of associated failures and things yet to be done, things left on the table, policy undone and a range of policy failures.

What is most disturbing about that record, after almost 11 years in power, is that rather than getting on with the job, getting serious about trying to make amends and actually dealing with some of the serious policy failures, all we get are excuses. It is always somebody else’s fault. They blame everybody; in particular, they blame the states. The states are an easy target for this government. In fact, if you listen to this government, on the one hand they are the masters of everything in Australia, they want to take over every program and be responsible for everything, and on the

other hand they want no responsibility and want to blame the states for everything that does not go right.

In fact, I would go so far as to say that the coalition are becoming tired and complacent. They are running out of innovative ideas and enthusiasm and they have certainly run out of accountability, which once upon a time they prided themselves on. Being in power for over a decade now and regularly deflecting any forward planning on the big issues that would ultimately drive and sustain our economy well into the future, it is starting to shape up as though the government have been out to a very long lunch. While you would expect that they would come back a little boozy, they have not come back as yet and it might be some time before they are back in the room.

This is at a time when we have strong economic fortune. In fact, it is at a record high for most people—the economy is doing well in most parts, better in some than in others. People could be forgiven for thinking that Australia could surf the same wave of economic fortune that we have experienced for the last 16 consecutive years. They could be excused for thinking that those 16 years may continue on to a further 16 years, but it is not that simple. What has delivered us those 16 years of year-on-year economic growth took some hard decisions and hard work, but not by this government—they have only been in charge for nearly 11 years—it started well before this government.

I will talk a little bit about that in a moment. The point I want to make is quite simple: if the government in power today does not take some hard decisions then we are not going to have another 16 years of economic growth. We are pretty lucky; Australia is enjoying a once-in-a-lifetime resources boom. It is delivering to government untold riches and surpluses that even this freely spending government finds difficult to blow all in one go. It should not be of any surprise though that, under the current circumstances, these huge surpluses are bettered every year by even larger than expected windfalls from the resources boom in my home state of Queensland and, of course, from our good friends in Western Australia as well—two states that are delivering masses of revenue to the government. Coupled with a free-flowing tax river of gold derived from the GST, the federal government has never been better placed to leave a lasting legacy for future generations, most importantly for the young people of today. I do not want to leave out the working men and women of today as well, who could do with a little boost in skills, training and a bit of reform in some of those areas that could deliver some real productivity growth and some real benefits, not only to them but to this country and our economy. Unfortunately, these things I speak about that we should be doing are not happening. They are not happening because the government has taken its eye off the ball and has done so for many years. The

Australian government is wasting this once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to seriously invest in human capital and much needed infrastructure in the pursuit of salvaging something from the policy wreck that is the Iraq war and the attack on working families' rights.

The harsh reality is that the resources boom like all booms will eventually subside. I am not making predictions as to when that will be, but all booms come, go and will probably come back again in another cycle. But we need to start to look at this boom and what it delivers to the economy from a different angle. We need to start again looking at the issues of productivity, skills, education, training and, of course, innovation. Innovation is that central topic that I want to try to direct my comments at today.

When we ask whether the government have started planning and started work on innovation, I think most people would say no. Have they started looking at the alternatives that would keep this country internationally competitive in the future? I would say the answer to that again is no. If the answer is a maybe, they are not doing enough and they are certainly not doing it well enough. It seems that the government have been way too preoccupied with other issues, which seem to be more important to them than the future prosperity of this country—issues I have mentioned such as the war in Iraq, the industrial relations debate and more and more ever-growing regulation for small business. It is no secret that many people from a wide variety of sectors, including the Labor Party, have been calling for real change for many years—change in the way we invest in education, in the way we invest in skills and training, in the way we invest in R&D and in the way that we deal with the future drivers of our economy such as innovation.

Australia needs a new wave of reform much like that which the Hawke and Keating Labor government started 20 years ago when we made those very important sweeping economic reforms and changes, such as floating the dollar—those tough decisions that have delivered today what we enjoy in the economy. These are the sorts of reforms that have delivered much, if not all, of the economic prosperity that we enjoy today. One thing I am certain of is that it can happen again if a government were to get serious about what it is that actually drives the economy. Labor firmly believe in a strong economy, but at the same time we also believe that you do not have to throw out the fair go to achieve it.

The leader of the federal Labor Party, Kevin Rudd, recently made two speeches that succinctly tied together some salient ideas and necessary directions for a successful Australian economy in the 21st century. Amongst these is the need for Australia to renew its commitment to investing in our human capital—commitments to education, skills and training. If recent



economic history, both globally and domestically, have taught us anything, it is that the world's strongest, most dynamic economies are those that do not piggyback on periodic resources booms but rather invest the windfall in their own people to create comparative advantage and future prosperity.

The stark reality is in the data on the sorts of matters I am talking about. If you look at where Australia sits in the OECD, we do not look very good. We are the only country that, in net terms, is going backwards with spending and education. So, while other countries have understood the need to invest in education, science and research, the need to provide the economic and fiscal tools business needs to help them promote innovation and productivity growth and change, Australia in real terms has been going backwards. It simply does not make sense.

The quality of Australia's investment in human capital is directly and intimately related to the subject I wish to elaborate on today—that is, innovation in the Australian economy. Quite literally the quality of innovation taking place in our economy will determine whether or not Australia succeeds or fails in the future as a smart, productive and competitive member of the global economy. You will hear a lot of talk in this place, in workplaces and at kitchen tables around the country from people genuinely concerned about the free trade agreements with China and the United States, the growing level of imports into this country, the receding exports we have from this country and the failures in some of our manufacturing sectors—though not all—and where this leaves us in terms of a global competitive advantage. It is one thing to have a great economy based on a range of factors but another to be very principally based on a resources boom, basically digging up minerals and selling them. It does not do a lot for our future. A smart country would take that natural advantage and build on it through education and innovation.

Innovation consists of that dynamic part, the driving core, of a market economy such as ours. Innovation will determine the types of industries and the quality of life we hope to enjoy in the future—the quality of life we want for our kids to grow up in. We can innovate. In fact Australia has a great history of innovation.

**Fran Bailey**—Especially small business.

**Mr RIPOLL**—I agree. In fact, small business and individuals have driven innovation in this country. But they do need a hand, and that is the point of some of the issues I am raising. Innovation, it can be said, has a persuasive influence that is hard to understand and quantify, but it almost always is self-evident. Indeed, interestingly, in the recently released Productivity Commission draft research report, it was noted that the full productive effects of research and development cannot be easily measured but nonetheless add consid-

erably to our economy's productivity via 'complex causal pathways'. This is an opinion which echoes to an extent that of the Business Council of Australia's recent report, *New concepts in innovation: the keys to a growing Australia*, which reminds us that innovation goes beyond research and development to capture the full spectrum of business activities that seek to improve and to augment goods and services.

The reason I raise that is to say to government clearly that sometimes, while you cannot measure exactly the productive paths to get to innovation, how you commercialise and the whole process, it is important to believe in it and to support it. There is no doubt in this country that that is something that we have not been doing. Innovation creates new industries and new products. It also renews old products. You can turn old industries through new methods of production and management coordination into new industries. Innovation creates new opportunities and new markets. It creates new opportunities for Australians to increase their wealth and standard of living. Most importantly, it creates new jobs in a whole range of areas which may not exist today. I think that is where government should be really focusing its energies.

Australia has a great reputation as a country of people who are resourceful and inventive, but our reputation does little to mask the reality that too many of our best people and best ideas are lost overseas. I would find it hard to believe that anyone in this place would disagree with that view. It has been said that the new global currency is talent; therefore, if we want to continue the lifestyle currently enjoyed by most Australians, then trading in this new currency is our new forefront. We need to trade in the currency of talent. This is our competitive advantage. This is how we can beat China. This is how we can compete with India. This is how we can remain competitive in the global market that faces all of us.

This notion that the new global currency is talent brings with it a lot of meaning. It really focuses attention on who the next group of people to determine the future will be and where they will come from. Will they come from Australia? Will they be our young people who are going to school today? Will they be the great innovators and inventors who find new ways to deal with old industries, who learn new ways to manage and to deal with financial products and who sell our intelligence to the rest of the world? Or will we remain an economy that bases its wealth on resources, non-elaborate manufactures with no value adding? Which economy do we want to be? That is the question I ask government.

There are certainly no barriers to stop any Australians today from leading the world in things such as medical science, nanotechnology, information technology, science and manufacturing technology, biotech-

and the aviation industry, just to name a few. Australians are actually great thinkers. We find all sorts of new ways to do things. I have quite a number just in my very humble area of Ipswich, in the great south-east of Queensland. We already do some of these things there. We already lead the world. But what I find most disturbing is that the people involved in these areas are frustrated. They are frustrated by the lack of support and, I think, the lack of belief in them from the federal government. They find all sorts of programs at state level—and there are programs at federal level as well, but they find they are bungled down in bureaucracy. They find little support in other areas, and they often find themselves with wonderful ideas—great inventions and great innovations—but they have to go overseas to see them commercialised or turned into something real. Then they often sell those technologies back to us, something which I find unsatisfactory.

What Australia has lacked over the past decade is a serious focus from government, a focus where a strong light is placed on what will be the driver for the next 16 years. Creating an economic environment conducive to innovation involves the maintenance of a stable macroeconomic environment—there is no question about that. Amongst other things, this includes the maintenance of a sensible fiscal and monetary approach to trade policy and a provision of adequate investment in physical economic infrastructure—something which this government is highly lacking in and something which I have spoken about in this House many times. There is a glaring inadequacy in the Howard government on these issues.

In addressing the right incentives for innovation, government must also address both the supply and demand sides of the challenges for innovation in Australia. In the case of both the supply and the demand sides, the government must construct support measures for innovation, R&D and commercialisation that help to alleviate market failures, rather than becoming simple replacements for market components. For example, the Productivity Commission makes the good point that R&D tax concession schemes must be carefully weighed and constructed to ensure that any support sought is indeed classified as R&D and would otherwise not have been undertaken by firms. Government should not replace R&D investment but rather give support measures to encourage more. In fact, the Labor Party, who are strong supporters of research and development, are looking at ways and measures to make it much more flexible and to support business research and development, including improvements to the tax concession regime. I think there is a whole range of areas that government just sits on and does not look at. I think it is something that we will need to do when we get into government.

Business has also called for reform of incentives regarding seed funding, Australia's venture capital industry and capital gains, which are issues that Labor is actively considering. We are focused on these issues because we know that is where the next round of productivity growth will come from. That is where the next round of jobs will come from. They are the sorts of issues that will save and grow our manufacturing sector so we are not just reliant on a resources boom.

On the demand side, government needs to devise and instigate policies that support research and development in new goods and services. As the recent Business Council of Australia discussion paper on new concepts and innovation perceptively argues, research and development and the acquisition of new knowledge is not innovation at all unless it is developed into actionable processes and products by business; hence, the demand side of innovation solutions in Australia should concentrate on improving commercialisation of both public and private innovation in Australia today.

In the same vein, government programs such as the Commercial Ready and COMET schemes need to be reviewed and monitored more closely in order to ascertain the extent of their positive effect on the private sector. These are good and important programs, but they need to be carefully monitored and reviewed to ensure that they deliver what they are meant to. Again, there is no point in government just throwing money in the air and hoping it lands on the right tables. It is a little bit more involved than that and it takes a sharp focus from government. In light of our history of poor commercialisation performance, such government schemes must be regularly monitored and research data gathered. We need to do a better job. Equally, schemes such as the cooperative research centres, CRCs, must be reviewed to ensure that policy structure provides sufficient incentive for such centres to obtain their originally stated objective of translating research output into economic, social and environmental benefits. These are the great challenges that face us today.

There are some other good policy areas which need to be looked at carefully. Export market development grants have done a great job over a number of years. In fact, the Australian Industry Group has identified them as being historically successful and in need of an extra funding injection to ensure their continued and wider use—something which I personally support and think is a good idea. Along with the creation of the appropriate economic incentives, there needs to be room for continued government support of innovation on a broader scale. History has taught us that if we give the right tools, mechanisms and processes to good Australian innovators then they will deliver for the economy.

In the short time I have left I would like to make a point about the organisation of Clay Pave in Dinmore, which used to be in my electorate but unfortunately no

longer is because of a redistribution. It is a brick-making, paving company. You would not think there would be a lot of innovation and new growth in making simple bricks, but this company not only seeks to keep its employees and work with unions constructively but also is one of the great innovators in Australia. They sell bricks to China. Can you imagine an Australian paver company selling bricks to China, the United States, Saudi Arabia in the Middle East, Japan and all sorts of areas? If an old industry like that can be innovative and can seek new ways and new markets, then I think there is hope for all industries in Australia. I think that is where the future is and that is the sort of company we should be looking at to make sure that Australia is productive in the future. (*Time expired*)

**Mr HARDGRAVE** (Moreton) (8.04 pm)—I am pleased to speak on the appropriation bills and to acknowledge my electoral neighbour the member for Oxley, who has coined a saying in the House tonight that the new global currency is talent. I was looking across at him and thinking how penniless he must be and how lacking he must be in any attempt at credit transfers to his good self. He is from the smart state, but he should be subject to a product recall. I listened to each and every one of the things that he said today and it was another of those contributions from those opposite of cherry-picking various parts of this government's efforts over the last 10 years to set up long-term future prosperity for Australia—not just simply the prosperity we are enjoying today but very much the long-term prosperity of Australians of this generation and those to come—yet they are hiding the fact that, root and branch, as this government has embarked on setting a proper course for good reward for effort and establishing ourselves on a long-term footing, the Australian Labor Party have fought us tooth and nail all the way.

This was exposed yet again on the weekend by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition, who has now pledged that a future Labor government would abolish individual contracts. Individual contracts in the form of AWAs are very much a part of restoring a sense of trust in the workplace. They are an opportunity for individual workers or their representatives to talk to their employers and an opportunity for those with abilities and skills who have something to trade to their employers to gain additional advancements. The abolition of those individual contracts would have a direct impact on the long-term employment viability of people in Australia, particularly those in the trades, because people with trade skills are a much sought after commodity in this nation today and rightly so.

On this side of the House we are celebrating the fact that workers are able to get more money in their pay packets, while those on the other side want to see a return to an 'everyone is paid the same' kind of envi-

ronment where no additional money is available to those with skills to trade to their employers. They want to restrict small businesses. I see my friend and colleague the Minister for Small Business and Tourism is in the House. She, like all of us on this side, is very concerned about Labor reinstituting their old unfair dismissal regime.

**Fran Bailey**—It would decimate it.

**Mr HARDGRAVE**—As the minister says, it would decimate small business. When the Southside Chamber of Commerce talked to me before the 1996 election they said, 'If you can get rid of this dumb unfair dismissal law we reckon there are 50,000 new jobs that could be created in Australia. If we could restore an environment where we could hire the best, maintain the best and pay the best a better wage but where, if there were those we didn't want in our workplace, we could dismiss them we would actually hire more staff, because the way Labor set it up is that even if you steal money from the till you can't be sacked.' That is Labor's vision. That is Labor's return. That is Labor's back to the future approach.

Labor also want to repeal the Howard government's Work Choices reforms and replace them with all sorts of significant changes that would further confuse and further envelope Australia's small business and, in particular, small business owners in a confusing matrix of changes. Just as things have settled down, just as 200,000 more jobs have been created, just as businesses gain the confidence to expand by hiring more people and just as businesses are investing in their businesses by training people in record numbers, the Australian Labor Party say, 'No, we don't want to do that anymore.' Why? It is all very obvious. It is handed down and writ large in the testament that comes from 'Sharon's burrow', the ACTU. It is passed on by the union movement, which reflects a smaller and smaller base of influence on the real working men and women of Australia.

Just a couple of dozen per cent of workers are actually involved in the union movement and a lot of them regret it and resent it, because they are forced to part with money to prop up union leaders. Yet here we have the Australian Labor Party saying, 'We will listen to the minority and we will impact on the majority in the workforce.' I am all for defending the defenceless minorities, but the very well oiled, very well heeled, over-resourced and overly important trade union movement in this country have got to get themselves back to their roots and represent what the workers say and not what their particular philosophical view on a particular matter happens to be. They should not simply represent those who go their way and maintain that everybody who does not has some sort of fascist streak running through them. By the directions they take in public policy, the Labor Party show that they do not trust or-

dinary men and women, ordinary workers, in this nation

Another point in this prosecution of the member for Oxley and those opposite is very plain. A hundred years ago the first member for Moreton was based in Ipswich. James Wilkinson resigned from the Labor Party before the 1901 election because they embarrassed him over conscription matters. They were also against Australia standing up for democracy in foreign battles in those days. It was all to do with the Boer War. Wilkinson resigned from the Labor Party, stood as an independent member and won two elections. Interestingly, when he joined the Labor Party again he lost that election. Ipswich is very much part of south-east Queensland's history. I am very proud to have come from that part of the world with family that have been there for many generations—right through; Ipswich and beyond.

It is extraordinary to think that the current member for Oxley should say these words tonight. As far as he is concerned, digging up stuff does not do a lot for us in terms of the future. The whole city of Ipswich and the viability of south-east Queensland have been built around the coalmining industry. It has been the mainstay of so much of Ipswich's economy. I am sure that out at the Swanbank mines 1 and 2 and at the CFMEU's headquarters at Ebbw Vale they will be somewhat stirred up by a member for Oxley who wants to dump on the mining industry in this way in favour of the cafe latte brigade from the electorate of the member for Kingsford-Smith and, indeed, that of the member for Griffith and talk down the idea of the coal industry.

As the *Courier Mail* said last Saturday, \$26 billion in exports and 20,000 Queensland jobs would be sacrificed off the back of the Labor Party following the loony left's approach on these issues. Even worse, those coal exports would automatically be substituted with coal from countries that do not have the quality coal we offer out of Queensland, which is more likely to provide a cleaner burning capacity and not feed into greenhouse gas emissions to the extent that dirtier coal from places like China does. But here we have the member for Oxley turning his back on the birthright of the electorate he claims to represent and jumping on the coal industry in this way. I think he should be ashamed of himself tonight.

We are very concerned about Labor's approach on these matters for another reason. It was of course outed last week by the *Financial Review*, which said that the member for Griffith, as the latest Leader of the Opposition, has moved to secure preferences from the extreme Green movement in Queensland ahead of this year's election. So it is all about the pragmatics of trying to win a few seats—saying whatever it is the Greens want to hear and hoping the rest of us do not realise the impact that this kind of approach will have on Australia's

long-term future prosperity. As the Prime Minister said in his weekly radio message:

Australia's prosperity will be put at grave risk if Labor is elected.

They cannot be trusted on the economy. They have too many small-minded, narrow based interest groups. To cobble together their platform, they have to build around these narrow-minded interest groups. These sorts of knee-jerk responses to climate change could damage the mining and energy sectors. Our experience and track record as a government have shown that it is our way to make considered moves that will take jobs forward, not detract from the employment situation in Australia, and that will build the prosperity we already have in this country, not destroy it.

When you stop to think about the recently announced water package of over \$10 billion, it is an amount of money very similar to the sort of interest that we were paying on government debt alone when we came to office in 1996—the \$96 billion black hole in the Labor Party's budget. Their mishandling of the economy delivered a \$10.5 billion interest payment each year. That meant every bit of tax collected had to go towards paying that before anything else could be done. By comparison, this government has shown itself willing to back communities that want to work in favour of their local communities, trusting local communities in partnership with the Australian government.

One of the best examples which are dealt with in these bills is the Investing in Our Schools program. In my electorate, there are 41 projects worth \$3.1 million. That money has gone directly into the hands of local school P&Cs—money which the Australian government has passed to local communities as a sign of trust in their common sense and good exercise of that money and those projects.

It is astonishing to think that in south-east Queensland the neglect of the Beattie state government has meant that the statistics associated with Investing in Our Schools are like this: 11 schools have air-conditioned parts of their schools. Twenty-one schools in all have been helped in my electorate, including special schools. These are schools with kids with physical and sometimes mental disabilities. When I rang the Tennyson Special School late last year and told them of the \$132,975 grant that will help them with a specialised learning area, I had a teacher crying over the phone. These sorts of moments are enormously emotional for me as a local member.

Moorooka State School had a fire late last year, but before that happened \$148,800 was provided for a new canteen complex that is going into a long-awaited school assembly hall. It is a great local school that does a lot in our community and has done for many generations, and in more recent times it has provided a real focus for kids with refugee backgrounds from places

like Sudan. This school should be mightily proud of its record, and that \$148,000 from the Australian government made its day.

Warrigal Road State School received \$150,000 for a new library and upgrade of computers. It has the highest Islamic population of any state government school in Queensland; it is also hugely dedicated to its students from a Chinese-speaking background. It has made an enormous difference in many lives and is getting this vote of support with funding going directly to the local P&C to spend. Even some new schools needed funding. Stretton State College received \$49,100 for new play equipment and shade structures—forgotten by the state government but paid for by Australian taxpayers.

I want to pay tribute to Siganto and Stacey, a local air-conditioning company in my electorate, which, as parents of students at Sherwood State School, value-added to a Commonwealth grant of \$150,000 for air conditioning and made sure the century-old library building was properly air-conditioned. Robertson State School received three grants totalling \$99,733 to air-condition demountable buildings, for a new playground refurbishment and for new library books. I was very proud to be a part of the openings of some of those facilities last year.

We have also looked very strongly at infrastructure questions. Gearing ourselves for a long-term, viable future for Australia is not simply about investing in our schools and the young people of today; it is also about building some of the physical infrastructure. The Granard Road overpass at the start of the Ipswich Motorway was opened late last year by me and the Minister for Local Government, Territories and Roads, the Hon. Jim Lloyd. It is an \$18 million project, something also left undone by the state government. It now provides a safe environment with four lanes on Ipswich Road as it becomes the motorway passing over Granard Road.

We are very frustrated with the speed of progress by the Queensland Department of Main Roads, which prides itself on being as slow and as costly as it can be! If there were some way of building physical infrastructure without having to rely on Queensland Main Roads, I would like to do it—and maybe I will move a private member's bill to make it possible to fund active and capable companies to do some of the things we want.

Let me use the example of the Acacia Ridge grade separation, where the national rail corridor at Acacia Ridge—the Queensland government owned Brisbane-Sydney rail corridor—crosses Beaudesert Road. There was a big prang there the other day which caused hours of delay, but there are normally 15 to 20 minute delays each time a train leaves the Acacia Ridge rail freight terminal. The Queensland government wanted \$25 million from us three years ago and we put \$25 million

forward. Nothing has happened; it has sat there and done nothing. It has now gone from a \$50 million project to a \$105 million project. Not one sod has been turned, yet the price has more than doubled.

Look at what has happened with the Logan Motorway and Ipswich Motorway interchange at Gailles. Minister Lloyd and I were there the other day helping to turn the sod. We have seen that go from \$155 million to \$255 million—again an almost doubling of the project. Despite the fact that four years ago it was voted that the money go to that project, nothing has been done by the Queensland government.

Consider what is happening at Kessels and Mains Roads. Kessels and Mains Roads need to have a grade separation with Mains Road going under Kessels Road—a project that is going to cost some hundreds of millions of dollars. It is one thing to advantage local residents instead of interstate truck traffic, but here we have the Australian Labor Party saying they are in favour of interstate trucks on local roads and that local residents can take second place when it comes to infrastructure. Federal Labor and state Labor continue to say they want to put Kessels Road under Mains Road. Federal Labor and state Labor say all they want to do is keep the trucks running through Robertson, Coopers Plains, Salisbury and Macgregor and through Upper Mount Gravatt and Wishart in the member for Bonner's electorate.

When you talk about the Ipswich Motorway, federal Labor and state Labor have no imagination to bring to the question of infrastructure other than simply widening the current corridor by six lanes. They do not want to look at any other alternatives. They simply want the six-laning of a four-lane road, whereas we have been promising a total of 10 lanes in that corridor by using some new corridors. Federal Labor and state Labor have run out of puff and run out of ambition to do anything when it comes to infrastructure.

Turning to water, the problem we have in south-east Queensland at the moment is most profound. Here in Canberra they are running around trying to tighten up a few leaky taps! If we had had the Wolffdene dam built in the late eighties, which the member for Griffith when he was the key adviser and string-puller of the then Queensland Premier advised him not to do, we might be having more water at our disposal in south-east Queensland. We now have the pretend Prime Minister, the member for Griffith, trying to hide his track record when it comes to his failure on Queensland infrastructure—the failure of the Goss government years, which he was the chief architect of, to build the Wolffdene dam and to provide proper road infrastructure.

When you start to deal with all of these issues you start to see a pattern emerge. You start to know that the Australian Labor Party will cherry-pick their way

through the next six months. It is the old confidence trick of keeping people amused with one hand while doing something else to them with the other. I do not believe Australia would ever want to risk the prospect of the sort of damage that could come from a team that actually has no new ideas and no new ambitions. When you look at what they have done in government you realise there is a complete lack of ambition amongst state Labor governments as well.

Look at the area of vocational and technical education—the portfolio involvement I had until recently. In 1995 Labor's budget was \$1 billion towards things like funding TAFEs. In this current year it is \$2.6 billion. When Labor was last in government just 123,000 people were taking on apprenticeships. Now it is over 400,000. For the member for Oxley or any other person opposite to want to get up and start to talk about the side of this place that has got an eye on building for the long-term benefit of Australia they are of course talking through their hat when they start to claim some great expertise. On this side we have not only the track record and experience but also the ambition to do even more in favour of the everyday people of this nation. This country deserves the best that the experience of the last 10 years can provide in the years to come, and I am certainly determined to be a part of the process of making sure we are here to deliver on that. (*Time expired*)

**Mr ALBANESE** (Grayndler) (8.25 pm)—This is a government that makes policy announcements for its short-term political interest rather than serving the long-term national interest. It is a government that serves its own political interests consistently. Not even the management of Australia's most precious and essential resource, water, has been an exception. In a spectacular display of policy on the run, the Prime Minister announced his intention to spend \$10 billion on water policy and the Murray-Darling Basin in the absence of any detailed costing, time lines or management details. Had John Howard been the chairman of a board and taken a \$10 billion decision without prior consultation with board members and key stakeholders he would have been swiftly moved on.

Ten billion dollars is a big figure, but the lack of detail in the way these funds will be distributed and the absence of critical information, such as how the problem of water allocation will be addressed, remain. Simple questions remain immersed in uncertainty. Will there be a compulsory government buyback of water entitlements or not? Will the Prime Minister concern himself with addressing Australia's water crisis or will he ensure that he avoids a crisis between the Liberal Party and the National Party. In short, the Prime Minister's expectation is that the plan will simply be accepted, no questions asked. This is no way to provide national leadership and no way to address the nation's

water problems associated with the Murray-Darling Basin.

The basin is too important to Australia's long-term prosperity to leave out critical information or get details wrong because of inadequate preparation and consultation by the Howard government. It is quite clear that more effort was put into writing the political speech to be delivered by the Prime Minister on 25 January than in getting the details right on costing. We know that the Department of the Treasury was brought in at the last minute on the costing of this proposal. We know also that the Department of Finance and Administration was consulted just days before the Prime Minister's speech.

Federal Labor has strongly called for national leadership in the management of Australia's water and the Murray-Darling Basin, but we still believe the questions that remain unanswered require a response from the government. Indeed, it is extraordinary that now on 12 February the government has still refused to brief the opposition on the details of the plan. Take, for example, the nine pages of concerns of the Murray-Darling Basin Commission with the proposal. They identified a \$900-million black hole in costings, which has still not been adequately explained. They identified the six forgotten rivers in the southern part of the Murray-Darling Basin. A sensible, well-thought-out plan would not have forgotten the 1,484-kilometre Lachlan River in New South Wales or the Campaspe River that supplies town water to Bendigo. Why wasn't the Murray-Darling Basin Commission consulted before the 25 January announcement? Why weren't the state premiers consulted—or the irrigators, or anyone in rural Australia? It is quite clear that short-term political interests rather than the long-term national interest drove the Prime Minister to act. That is the context of the government's introduction of the Murray-Darling Basin Amendment Bill into this House on 7 December. It was due for debate last week, but the government deferred that, as they deferred the Senate committee inquiry into the bill.

From that we know that, as of December, the government was considering a Murray-Darling Basin management system that was business as usual. We know that this was very much a last-minute cobbled together plan, which is why the government has refused to or is simply unable to provide answers to questions not just from the opposition but from its own Murray-Darling Basin Commission. I remind the House that the commission is chaired by a former Speaker, Ian Sinclair.

At a time when towns and cities across Australia, such as Toowoomba and Goulburn, are confronting severe water shortages and our major cities all have long-term water restrictions, it is extraordinary that the federal government is saying that it wants no involve-

ment in the issue of urban water supply. This issue affects almost 75 per cent of Australians. After years of relentless drought in south-eastern Australia, regional towns and cities are seriously considering the implications of running out of water. Contingency plans have been put in place for transporting water, at massive cost, to communities such as Goulburn and Ballarat.

Urban Australia's water use and supply needs urgent attention. It is a disgrace that it has not been addressed despite the fact that the National Water Initiative envisaged a major reform. A range of options are needed to secure water supply, with water recycling prioritised because it is cost effective, uses less energy than alternatives and has minimal waste. The greater use of recycled water for industrial and agricultural uses will free up valuable drinking water and help increase environmental water flows. It is in the long-term national interest to facilitate the use of recycled water.

Federal Labor has developed a platform to ensure Australian towns and cities have a sustainable water supply. We have set a national target of 30 per cent of waste water being recycled by 2015. We will develop consistent, comprehensive national guidelines for water recycling. We will provide the leadership, support and investment necessary to achieve the 30 per cent recycling target. We will encourage innovation and new technological solutions to deliver a sustainable water supply for Australia.

The Howard government is sitting on a \$2 billion fund, the Australian water fund, which was established in 2004. This is money that was withheld from the states as a result of national competition payments. Three years on from the 2004 plan, more than half of that \$2 billion remains unspent. At a time when we have a national water crisis, we have a government that is prepared to withhold spending on critical water infrastructure until closer to an election because it is the election cycle that motivates the government rather than the need for good policy development.

The member for Moreton raised the issue of water in south-east Queensland. I say to him: get the Howard government to move on the funding of the Western Corridor Recycled Water Scheme. This is a \$1.7 billion project. It will be the biggest recycling scheme in the Southern Hemisphere, yet the government has refused to fund that project. The only explanation is that it is waiting to make expenditure announcements closer to the election.

As with water infrastructure, the provision of energy infrastructure is also imperative to the long-term national interest. While multiple energy solutions are required to meet Australia's future energy needs, the Howard government has failed to invest in key clean-energy markets. Australia is economically poorer as a result. Just 10 years ago, when the Howard government came to office, Australia had 10 per cent of the world's

solar energy industry. Now we have only two per cent. Howard government policies have driven Australian companies and jobs overseas and created a solar energy boom in Germany, China and California.

Despite the rhetoric heard from the Prime Minister, the Treasurer and others on the other side, I would like to remind the House of two key reasons that underlie our current economic prosperity. The first is the economic reforms of the Hawke-Keating government: the floating of the Australian dollar, sound national competition policy and superannuation for all Australians. All represent reforms that have set in train a decade of prosperity and created an opportunity to invest in our nation's future growth.

The second reason includes external economic circumstances that have provided Australia with a rare opportunity. Australia is experiencing an unprecedented resources boom. It is estimated that in 2006 alone the global resources boom added \$55 billion to our national income. The flow-on effects of the resources boom include higher wages, lower unemployment, higher company profits and a tax windfall for the federal government. In fact, the ANZ Bank's Chief Economist, Saul Eslake, has estimated that over the last four budgets the federal government has received an additional \$263 billion in tax revenue above its original estimates because of variations caused by the resources boom.

The current favourable economic circumstances have presented John Howard with a choice: squandering the opportunities presented by the resources boom or investing in Australia's long-term prosperity. It is quite clear that this government has failed to invest in Australia's long-term prosperity. This once-in-a-lifetime resources boom has been overseen by a government that has done little to relieve the chronic skills shortage or ease infrastructure bottlenecks. History will not look favourably upon these lost opportunities.

To secure Australia's long-term prosperity, we must boost productivity and boost our international competitiveness. If Australia is to achieve sustainable prosperity and implement policies for the long-term national interest, we must have a comprehensive plan that strikes all the levers of productivity. Australians know all too well that the only lever of productivity that the Howard government is willing to play political games with is the one that results in slashing the wages and conditions of Australian workers. It believes that the way that Australia should be competitive is by engaging in a wages race to the bottom with our neighbours. Of course that is not the way forward.

Labor leader Kevin Rudd has already highlighted the need for an education revolution and the importance of investing in the skills of our workforce and in nation-building infrastructure. On this side of the House we know that our national infrastructure is the

economic and social base of our prosperity. It is our roads, ports, airports, pipes, grids, cables, communication networks, schools, hospitals, aged care and child-care facilities. Infrastructure gets employees to and from work and allows doctors and nurses to deliver health care and teachers to build tomorrow's skills base. If our infrastructure networks are inadequate or insufficient, our competitors will gain an advantage and our long-term prosperity will be at risk.

Infrastructure, like education and skills development, is an area where the Howard government has failed to face Australia's future needs. Australia's basic infrastructure is grossly inadequate. It is perhaps the nation's most serious weakness, and that has been identified by the Reserve Bank, the Productivity Commission and other economic bodies. Redevelopment of existing infrastructure is proceeding at a snail's pace, and if we continue with present policies there will be no possibility of building the infrastructure base we need to maintain and increase productivity into the future.

Under the current conditions we will have no realistic prospect of providing for our future needs. We will face gross congestion or gridlocked roads, particularly on the rapidly growing eastern seaboard. We will face greater capacity constraints at Australian ports that will further limit the volume of our exports. Inadequate energy infrastructure will impact on our ability to provide sufficient and sustainable clean energy to both industry and households. An archaic telecommunications infrastructure will leave us behind the rest of the world when it comes to knowledge exchange.

With continuing population growth, poor infrastructure management has now brought us to the tipping point, where, if major increases in the rate of investment in infrastructure are not commenced urgently, our productivity will be severely impeded. The Business Council of Australia estimates that Australia already has a \$90 billion shortfall in infrastructure, yet investment in national infrastructure is continuing to fall. Earlier this month Treasury's own research stated that public infrastructure investment decreased from 2.5 per cent to 1.8 per cent of GDP between June 1987 and June 2006. In 2004 Australia ranked 20th out of 25 OECD countries in terms of investment in public infrastructure as a proportion of GDP.

Labor sees spending in infrastructure as an investment, not just as a cost. The short- and long-term economic benefits of investment in infrastructure are well documented. The Committee for Economic Development of Australia points out that investment in infrastructure generates higher returns on investment than other areas. We all know that accumulating infrastructure assets is essential, yet the Howard government has sold more assets over its term in office than it has built—an indictment of the approach of those opposite.

Having massive budget surpluses, to the exclusion of long-term investment, makes no economic sense and is bad policy. The Reserve Bank knows it, business knows it and Australians know it. Infrastructure investment and national leadership is needed now to put available infrastructure capital in touch with our nation's infrastructure priorities.

Federal Labor has a long-held plan to identify Australia's infrastructure needs and take action to close the gap. Our plan provides urgently needed national leadership, effective coordination across all levels of government and a strong commitment to sustain investment in public infrastructure. Labor has committed to establishing Infrastructure Australia, a peak Commonwealth agency to audit our infrastructure needs, set priorities and get projects on the move. Infrastructure Australia will be charged with analysing, monitoring and reporting on the delivery and operation of major infrastructure projects.

A coordinated and objective approach to long-term planning of and investment in nationally significant infrastructure is essential. There is too much overlap and duplication between different tiers of government, too many regulatory bodies and too much overlapping regulation. As a matter of urgency, Infrastructure Australia will conduct an audit of Australia's infrastructure to assess the adequacy, quality, capacity and condition of Australia's infrastructure assets and identify the gaps. Put simply, it will be a list of what we have got and a list of what we need. This list will be used to develop a national infrastructure priority list. After more than a decade in government, the Howard government has no official, up-to-date record or database on the state of the nation's economic infrastructure assets.

Labor is also committed to using the income stream from the Future Fund for future infrastructure investment. Labor has a long-term, sensible approach to infrastructure financing, recognising that both capital and expertise may be efficiently sourced from the private sector, the public sector or a combination of both. Superannuation investment strategies point to the opportunities for private savings to be invested in low-risk, long-term infrastructure projects.

We must get productivity growth back on track and the national government must once again engage with our cities. That is why one of the first announcements of Labor's new leader, Kevin Rudd, was that Labor would conduct a 'major cities' program. Once again, as with Chifley, as with DURD under the Whitlam government and as with Brian Howe's Better Cities Program, it will need to be a Labor government that takes up the issue of urban infrastructure. In the context of climate change, building sustainable cities through appropriate infrastructure in our cities and our towns is more essential than ever before.



Productivity is a key. One of the key levers to boosting productivity growth is investment in nation-building infrastructure. We cannot tolerate, nor can we afford, a government driven by short-term political interest. The long-term national interest must come first. Australians need a nation-building government and we need it as urgently as possible. Come the next election, with a Rudd Labor government we will once again see national leadership that is prepared to take on the infrastructure challenge that has been left behind by more than a decade of neglect.

**Mr BRUCE SCOTT** (Maranoa) (8.45 pm)—I rise this evening in this debate on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2006-2007 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2006-2007 to bring to the attention of the House the importance to the economy of Australia of the mining sector and the wealth that all Australians benefit from as a result of its exports and the jobs that it creates, not only in our regional towns but also in many rural communities where mines are located. I do not like using the word 'boom' but the mining sector in Australia is certainly going through a very strong period. We in this country are very lucky to have those resources, so many of them still untapped and undiscovered. We are able to draw on those and develop those mines to bring wealth to all Australians.

I draw attention to this against the backdrop of the exceptional drought that still extends right across the length and breadth of Australia and the impact that that is having on the national economy, particularly in relation to agricultural exports. In the last 18 months our agricultural exports have been hit by this drought. The impact of the drought is felt not only by farming families but by the whole nation because it has tended to slow the economy down. Maybe the announcement by the Reserve Bank today was tempered by its knowledge of the impact of the drought on our agricultural exports—it saw it as one of those factors that is tending to slow our economy.

I want to talk about the importance of the coal industry particularly to Queensland and to my electorate of Maranoa. The coal industry in Queensland is important for exports and for the jobs it creates in many rural towns. It is an important driver of the power that is generating in Queensland and feeds into the national grid. Of course, without those coal fired power stations we would have to ask: what we would we use as the energy source to generate the power that Queensland and the nation needs, not to mention the regional jobs that I have seen grow in Maranoa? I cite the town of Emerald, which 15 years ago was a town of about 5,000 or 6,000 people. Today its population is about 15,000 and growing because, quite apart from the agriculture, horticulture and irrigation in that community, Emerald has become a hub for the coal industry in that region of the Bowen Basin.

I want to highlight the importance of the coal industry to Queensland because it is the state's No. 1 export. It now exceeds the value of beef exports, which are the No. 2 export from Queensland. So coal generates more export wealth from the state of Queensland than any other single export. And it is important both for those companies that are out there looking for more coal and looking to how they can develop those mines and for the workers and their families to know that there is security for those leases and therefore security for their jobs. Their jobs are in the coal industry; they have made it their life. I am sure members opposite would be aware that there are many second and third generation workers and working families in the coal industry. That is how they have grown up; they are now second and third generation coalminers. That is why I was surprised to hear the Labor spokesman on the environment, the member for Kingsford Smith, say that the Labor Party, if it were elected, would not allow any new coalmines to be developed in Australia. What a draconian policy. What would that do to regional Australia? What would that do to Queensland's economy? What would it do to the national economy? That is an undeniable statement by the environment spokesman for the opposition, the person who would like to be on the Treasury benches as the environment minister, the person who, if Labor were elected, would want to see the policy implemented.

As I said earlier, the Bowen Basin is partly in my electorate of Maranoa. Towns like Emerald, Tieri, Capella, Blackwater, Moura, Springsure and Rolleston are all towns that today are growing and vibrant because of the coal industry. This time last year I was in Rolleston when Xstrata opened its new mine. Perhaps if the member for Kingsford Smith had been the minister, rather than the coalition government being in office, that mine would never have come onstream because it is a new mine. Not far down the line from Springsure towards Rolleston is another lease that is going to be developed by a coal company. But under the policy of the Labor Party from its environment spokesman there will be no new coalmines. So how can investors, people who invest their hard-earned savings in these companies through the share market, invest with confidence? How can the working families have confidence? The Labor Party used to say it was the champion of the workers. How can Labor members come into this place and say that they are the friends of the working men and women who work in the coal industry? They would like to see it shut down. They do not want to see any new developments.

I also have the Surat coal basin in my electorate. The Surat basin is yet to be developed. It is one of those mining areas I referred to earlier. We are a lucky country. In the Surat coal basin there are a few very small mines that have started to open up. Its development has been restricted because the lack of essential rail trans-

port networks to the port has hampered its development.

I have met with the proponents of the rail line that would connect Wandoan through to Theodore and allow the expansion of the coalmines within the Surat coal basin. It is essential, if we are to see the Surat coal basin develop to its full potential, we make sure the rail transport links to the export ports are there. The only outlet they have now is through the port of Brisbane, and that is a very restrictive rail line—it goes down the very steep Toowoomba Range and then the coal trains have to go right through the length of Brisbane to get to the port of Brisbane. That is slowing the potential development of the Surat coal basin considerably.

Of course, if Labor were elected they would not want to see the Surat coal basin developed. The member for Kingsford Smith said ‘no new coalmines’. Here is a resource; many mining companies have leases there, they have worked out their investment strategy and a consortium is looking at the rail line that would go from Wandoan to Theodore, connecting into Miles from Chinchilla-Dalby and into Toowoomba, allowing those coalmines across the Darling Downs to develop. Not only would they be able to develop and bring wealth to the nation, they would bring wealth to those towns—Dalby, Chinchilla, Miles, Wandoan and Taroom—that for decades and decades relied on the agricultural sector almost exclusively for the jobs and wealth that was created to benefit those communities.

I say to the member for Kingsford Smith, other members of the Labor Party and my electors in Maranoa: if we had a Labor government and they implemented that policy, these mines would never develop. There are towns like Chinchilla that have waited for 50 or 60 years for something to come along that would help them grow as a regional community. It is the same for Dalby, Miles and Wandoan. They have been waiting for years and years for these mines to be developed, and to see the wealth that would be created benefiting the towns. Already the towns of Chinchilla and Dalby have grown by over 1,000 people in the last three years. A new power station has recently been developed just near Chinchilla. It is a coal fired power station, would you believe, Mr Deputy Speaker Jenkins, relying on a new coalmine to be able to resource that power station which feeds right into the national grid.

The coal industry is important not only for Australia but also for the regional communities. We all benefit from a healthy, well-developed mining sector. I say to the member for Kingsford Smith that his comments are ones that my colleagues, the parliamentary secretary at the table and I will certainly tell the people of the new electorate that has been created in Queensland: the electorate of Flynn.

**Mr Anthony Smith**—We will be duty bound.

**Mr BRUCE SCOTT**—As the parliamentary secretary says, we will be duty bound to remind those electors of Flynn, those mining families and the people of Gladstone who rely on the wealth that is created by the coal export terminal in Gladstone that if they were to elect a Labor government their jobs would be at risk. The lifestyle that they have been able to build up, the security they have been able to give their families and the ownership of their own homes in these regional communities will all be put at risk because of a stupid policy of the Labor Party.

I can assure the members opposite that we will be letting those good electors of Gladstone, Moura, Biloela, Blackwater, Emerald and all those coalmining communities—good communities, wonderful people, growing towns full of young families—that they should be well aware of the policy of the Labor Party that there will be no new coalmines in Australia under a federal Labor government.

The other impact that this policy would have on the economy of Australia would be to slow our economy. In fact, over time it would probably put it into recession. It will certainly mean that we would have higher energy costs in Australia because if we are not able to generate sufficient electricity from coal fired power stations in the future we have to ask ourselves: what will we generate it from? It would be from alternative energy sources, so we would have higher energy costs for Australia and we would see the economy slow.

I notice that Mr Speaker has just come into the chair and that it is almost time for the adjournment. I say to the House and those opposite once again: their policy in relation to no new coalmines in Australia is one that would slow our economy, would stifle regional development and would have a dramatic impact on the Queensland economy over time. I say to members opposite that they are on the wrong course and that their policy is one that could put many working families out of a job over time. They stand condemned for that policy.

**Mr BRENDAN O’CONNOR** (Gorton) (8.58 pm)—With the very few seconds remaining I would like to commence my contribution to the debate on Appropriation Bill (No. 3) 2006-2007 and Appropriation Bill (No. 4) 2006-2007. The previous speaker made some comments about the remarks made by the member for Kingsford Smith. It is not true to say that Labor does not support the coal industry. In fact, what you have had without qualification from the Leader of the Opposition in the last two days has been entire support for the coal industry, the miners, the investors and the miners’ families. Labor does support the coal industry; in fact, it has a great history of support for that industry. We should not listen too closely to the words of the previous speaker. I think he is trying to make a point that, whilst heartfelt, is inaccurate and

clearly has a self-serving purpose. It is not accurate insofar as being the position of Labor in relation to the coalmining industry.

Debate interrupted.

### ADJOURNMENT

**The SPEAKER**—Order! It being 9.00 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

### Country Fire Authority

**Ms KING** (Ballarat) (9.00 pm)—I want to acknowledge the work of the firefighters of the Country Fire Authority and the Victorian Department of Sustainability and Environment this fire season. We have had an unprecedented fire season, starting far earlier than in previous years and stretching our volunteer resources. The season bore witness to Victoria's longest-running fire, the Great Divide fire, which has burnt with blistering heat for more than 69 days alongside fires across most of the state including Anakie just outside my electorate. The CFA and its counterpart DSE have well and truly stepped up to the plate. As I said, early this summer Victoria has seen the longest-running fire in my state's history scorching over one million hectares. As of the 31 January, 51 homes had been destroyed, over 1,741 livestock killed, and 17,877 hectares of pasture and crops, 141 tonnes of grain and 1,838 kilometres of fencing decimated by bushfires across Victoria.

Over Christmas and most of January this summer, while many Victorians were with their families enjoying a barbecue and watching Australia hand down yet another beating to the English cricket team, thousands of Country Fire Authority firefighters and support staff were in blistering heat fighting the bushfires that overtook much of Victoria. In total, more than 19,000 firefighters and support staff battled the Great Divide fire since 1 December 2006. I pay tribute and extend my thanks to the men and women including all of the New Zealanders, Canadians and Americans, and the firefighters from New South Wales, the Australian Capital Territory, South Australia, Western Australia and the Northern Territory who fought in all the bushfires this summer.

I would like to pay particular thanks to those firefighters from regions 15 and 14 brigades, the CFA areas that cover my electorate. This summer the terrific men and women from across my district have carried the banner of both the CFA and also of every town and community they come from into other areas of the state. They have reassured, counselled, planned and cared for people in towns near and far, and in many instances protected people's homes, livelihoods and their very lives. There were over 1,700 men and women from the brigades in my district and, if you include the 24 deployments from strike teams who went away to the alpine fires, this figure increases to

approximately 2,200 men and women from my district who helped fight fires this summer. These men and women attended to over 700 fires.

I would like to pay personal thanks to Daryl Thompson, Jayson Cook and Mark Vervoot, who were my fellow crew members on what was my first experience on a strike team since joining the Ballarat Fire Brigade. Having joined the Ballarat Fire Brigade about eight months ago, I had only undertaken my minimum skills and had not yet fought a fire. It is not until you confront a wildfire that you truly appreciate its force. As a member of strike team 1422 dealing with the fire when it finally swept into Tolmie on Tuesday, 16 January, I learnt a number of things. When your tanker driver says, 'It's going to get hot,' he means it is going to get really hot. Fire sweeps over the top of your head and you had better duck into the rocks pretty quickly. The protective clothing actually does work, thank goodness, and there is absolutely invaluable support provided by the aircrew. On the day that we were fighting the fire on 16 January we had both Elvis and Malcolm flying overhead dropping tonnes of water, and that really did save both the town of Tolmie and also the firefighters within it.

I also learnt what incredibly physical hard work it is to fight a fire. When the fire swept in, it felt like we were in the house that we were protecting for 10 minutes, but we had really been there for an hour and a half. I ended up fairly dehydrated after that experience, so hydration is absolutely critical as well. I also learnt the importance of people having a fire plan, having that work done well and truly beforehand, and the importance of consulting with the local CFA. But mostly I learnt about the professionalism, skill and commitment of the volunteers of the CFA. The members of the strike team were a great group of men and women and really did our region proud. Again I want to thank Daryl, Jason and Mark. Your advice, humour and friendship were absolutely invaluable and I really do want to thank you personally for looking out for me.

### Water

**Mr TICEHURST** (Dobell) (9.04 pm)—My electorate of Dobell is facing the prospect of level 5 water restrictions if we do not get reasonable rain. This would limit each resident to only 130 litres of water a day. As our local paper recently pointed out, if a person takes a five-minute shower, fully flushes the toilet three times, washes the dishes and does a load of washing twice a week, that is 130 litres gone.

The New South Wales Labor government's response to this crisis is to announce it will build a dam hundreds of kilometres away in Dungog with the water to be pumped down to us on the coast. Pipes do not even exist to enable Hunter water to meet its current commitment to the Central Coast. Not only will this make the Central Coast forever reliant on the Hunter for wa-

ter, but water is not expected to be flowing from the dam until at least 2013. That is six years away. The situation is already beyond belief. It is the middle of a hot summer and we cannot top up pools, gardens are wilting and people cannot wash their cars in their front yard. The population on the Central Coast is expected to rise by a whopping 26,000 people over the next ten years and Labor's solution is to have the Central Coast community wait several years for a dam to be built and hope and pray for the heavens to open up and fill it—that is, if it even gets built in 10 years. Central Coast residents are still waiting for the fast train between Sydney and Newcastle. That has been promised every state election for the last three or four times.

There are options available to improve our water supply now with less cost to the ratepayer, using the water that falls in our own catchment on the Central Coast. Indeed, the public works department's 1975 central coast water plan outlined the necessary projects. This begs the question: why would the state government ignore an option that is already planned and will produce results in two years with less cost to the ratepayer in preference to a dam that will not yield results for another 10 to 15 years, if that? It is plainer than day that the state government is ignoring the only viable option, and the community's preferred option, because they will not be reaping any revenue from it.

The Tillegra dam is just a backdoor way for the state government to strip our local identity and control and profit from the Central Coast's water supply, and it is a follow-on from their attempts to take over our joint water authority. Water from the Hunter/Central Coast pipeline will cost residents an additional 90c a kilolitre. Does the New South Wales government expect Central Coast residents to continue paying this for the next 60 years?

I was interested to discover that, during the latter stages of the Carr government, the Hunter Water Corporation was routinely paying dividends and taxes to the New South Wales government of more than 100 per cent of its operating profit and as high as 184 per cent. According to New South Wales Auditor-General reports, from 1999 to 2006, Hunter Water paid dividends and taxes to the state government of approximately \$423 million, with an operating profit in the same period of \$289 million.

This grand plan of Labor leaves the Central Coast indebted to the Hunter Water board for decades to come, as Premier Iemma's capital investment program continues to bleed Central Coast residents dry. The New South Wales government is the only entity to benefit from this absurd scheme—at the taxpayers' expense. Premier Iemma is selling water to the Central Coast. The federal government recently announced \$6.61 million for the Hunter connection pipeline and \$2.6 million towards the Porters Creek Wetland

Stormwater Harvesting project, both of which were grants, free from repayment.

State Labor must stop playing politics with our vital resources and get on with the job of providing real outcomes for the Central Coast. The practical solution to the water crisis is to use Mangrove Dam as a reservoir, as it was always intended, and put high river flows from the catchment into the dam. In the public works department's plan from 1975, this was the justification for the dam at Mangrove Creek. Announcements such as Tillegra dam confirm my concerns that, should the Central Coast joint water authority become an arm of the Iemma government, future proposals to increase water and sewerage charges for Central Coast residents will not be subject to the public scrutiny local people are entitled to expect.

The Australian government is committed to helping local councils find water solutions for current and future generations. I look forward to continuing to work with councils to secure the Central Coast's water future. The Liberal led coalition is working hard to develop a real plan that will mean the Central Coast can independently provide its own water. The Liberal candidates on the Central Coast have committed \$80 million towards the construction of the Lower Wyong transfer system and the Mardi Dam to Mangrove Dam transfer system—(*Time expired*)

#### Television Sports Broadcasting

**Mr GEORGANAS** (Hindmarsh) (9.09 pm)—I was highly disappointed last week to learn of the detail of Foxtel's deal with the free-to-air television networks in the carve-up of AFL games for the 2007 through to 2011 seasons. From the perspective of fans of South Australian teams, this deal represents a considerable drop in the quality coverage of Adelaide Crows and Port Power games in South Australia. The deal received immediate condemnation from many and varied sources, most notably communicated by contributors on Adelaide's KG and Cornsey's FIVEaa sports show, one of the highest rating metropolitan sports shows in Australia.

The outcome of this deal is nothing new, regrettably. We have seen it again and again in recent years—that is, the continual transference of substantial sporting events from free-to-air television to subscription TV. The Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts has stated in the past that the list of sporting events offered to free-to-air networks in the first instance are those of national importance and cultural significance. Flying in the face of her own assessment, last year we saw the qualifying rounds for the next World Cup bought up by subscription television, depriving hundreds of thousands of Australian fans of viewing access to our national soccer team, the Socceroos, in their bid for the next World Cup series.

Last week we saw continue the gradual transmigration of sporting events from free-to-air to subscription television. In response to concerns about the viewing public's decreased access, the AFL chief executive officer reportedly said:

I would encourage everyone to subscribe to Foxtel.

Well, that is okay if you can afford it, if you have lots of money; but too bad if you are a pensioner, disabled or unemployed and you cannot afford it. This is clearly the government's perspective also. Despite the Prime Minister acknowledging that the treatment of Adelaide viewers was 'pretty tough', he failed to mention that his government's policy regarding free-to-air multichannelling actually decreases the options available to networks wishing to increase the number of games televised live. This government prohibits networks from televising a game on one of their digital channels, working parallel to the usual analog station, until January 2009. All government restrictions, arbitrary as they may be, on the free-to-air networks' rights to televise multiple sporting events on digital channels will not be removed until the analog system is switched off, and that is not likely until around 2012 at best.

There is no clearer case of the Howard government restricting the technologically feasible televising options of the free-to-air networks, season after season after season. In so doing, it is not only purposely limiting the potential free-to-air televising of live sporting events around the country, much to the viewing public's disappointment, but also in the process encouraging the onselling of events, or part events, to subscription television through contracts locking in regrettable arrangements for half a decade to come.

Senator Coonan, the minister for communications, says, 'Pay to see sports on TV.' That was her view previously, as represented in the *Australian Financial Review*—a remarkably similar view to that expressed by the AFL CEO. The minister clearly has not learned from community disquiet or come to terms with the simple fact that many Australian families cannot afford the \$600 annual subscription fee for pay TV. They should not be penalised for that.

As Australians we must also not underestimate the great importance of ensuring that our children are exposed to various major sporting events on free-to-air TV. Kids love to emulate their sporting heroes, to the extent that most kids become actively involved in a team environment. This in itself allows kids to become disciplined, develop leadership skills in a team oriented environment, assume responsibilities, harness communication skills, form friendships, and place trust in others and expect the same in return. These are all qualities that will enable today's generation and future generations of young Australians to be better prepared in both their personal and professional lives in years to come.

I honestly hope that the interests of the majority of Australian sports enthusiasts speak louder than the 'For sale' flag on major sporting events and that those events continue to be broadcast on free-to-air TV.

### Iran

**Mr DANBY** (Melbourne Ports) (9.14 pm)—Just a month ago Mohammad Ahmadinejad, the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, stood with a former head of the Ku Klux Klan of America, David Duke, in Tehran. This was the first time ever that a Holocaust denial conference was supported by a sovereign state.

Iran is a sorry modern-day inheritor of the great civilisation of Persia. As many Persians in that unnecessarily economically and technologically backward society recognise, this disgraceful conference, sponsored by their country, is a cruel attempt by the mullahs to murder the memory of the six million Jews and five million other people murdered by the Nazis. Iran's apologia for Nazism, a tyranny all civilised people regard as a paradigm of evil, will leave a longstanding stain on the history of Persia. Normally, Australians and others in the democratic world would ignore such a gathering of cranks, fools and fantasists, but Iran's nuclear program forces the world to examine the views of its leadership.

Unfortunately, all serious analysts have come to the conclusion that there is a conceptional link between Ahmadinejad's threats to destroy the Jewish state, of which this sponsorship of the holocaust denial conference is apocryphal, and Iranian attempts to acquire atomic weapons. With this disgusting and demeaning lie, especially to many of the people in my electorate who are survivors, Ahmadinejad, the President of Iran, seeks to denigrate the suffering of a people even more ancient than his own.

The current leaders of Iran are not guided by the rational considerations that inform the democratic world in Europe, North America or East Asia, or even other authoritarian leaders such as Russia's Putin or China's Hu Jintao. Iran's leaders believe the Hidden Imam, the ninth century descendent of the Prophet Muhammad, will return to earth whereupon all people will adopt Shiism and they will rule the earth.

Yes, these propositions sound equally mad not just in democracies such as Europe and Australia but even to the communist rulers in China and to the authoritarian leadership in Russia. That is why, to the surprise of the ayatollahs, the UN Security Council, to its great credit, voted for sanctions on Iran on 23 December, just before Christmas. It is true that these sanctions may not be effective in getting Iran to stop its nuclear program, but I commend Australia and all other Western countries for imposing financial sanctions, restricting credits on Iranian banks, to try to slow the march of Iran towards atomic weapons. The nations that have imposed sanctions cannot discount that a majority of

Iran's leadership believe in the imminent return of the Hidden Imam, also known as the Mahdi.

As I said in an article in the *Financial Review*, it seems the key figures in the Iranian leadership see the destruction of Israel, even if it leads to a world war, as hastening the Mahdi's return. In Ahmadinejad's Weltanschauung—a German word meaning world view—even the destruction of large parts of Iran, in a nuclear exchange with Israel, would be a good thing if it brings the coming of the Mahdi. All of the Iranian leadership's statements making existential threats to the modern Jewish state give the impression that this is their serious view. Hence a supposed moderate, the former President of Iran, Ali Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, said that a 'nuclear exchange between Israel and Iran will leave nothing on the ground in Israel, whereas it will only damage the world of Islam'. These are very dangerous views. We have heard these views before in the history of the world.

Many of the people from my electorate have known all of our lives, as I have known, people who survived the death camps. Last night a thousand people gathered at the Melbourne Hebrew Congregation at the iconic dome synagogue in St Kilda Road to honour them, their testimony and the six million martyrs. On 30 January 1939, Hitler postured before the baying Nazi deputies of the Reichstag, promising 'der Vernichtung die Jüdische rasse in Europa', the annihilation of the Jewish race in Europe. These people mean what they say.

Apparently, even more than the December UN sanctions on Iran, Western financial disruption of Iran's lines of credit have caused serious consternation in Tehran. Let us hope so. Australia understands—I have spoken to the Leader of the Opposition and the Prime Minister about this—and I hope the world will understand, when Israel, the Jewish people and the world say, 'Never again.' (*Time expired*)

### Climate Change

**Mr BARTLETT** (Macquarie) (9.19 pm)—I rise in the House tonight to express the concerns of quite a few of my constituents about an issue that has been debated a lot of late—that is, the question of climate change. Many of my constituents have brought their concerns to me. They are concerns that I largely share. The scientific evidence clearly is that there is a significant threat to the world from greenhouse gas emissions, carbon dioxide emissions and global warming and, therefore, the impact on climate—a drier climate in many parts of the world, perhaps more extreme weather events and more extremes of climate—and the potential impact on rising sea levels. In electorates such as mine, there may be impacts on dryness and the threat of bushfires and impacts on some species in endangered ecosystems. There is no doubt in my mind that these are issues that do have to be addressed.

I have said to a number of my constituents that many of the criticisms raised about the government's response to this very real concern are unfounded and unfair—the criticism, for instance, that the government has somehow been sitting on its hands for years and doing nothing. The point that needs to be remembered is that some 10 years ago this government established the Australian Greenhouse Office to deal with this very issue. We were concerned enough 10 years ago to establish an office to look at the whole issue of greenhouse gas emissions and ways to reduce those emissions in Australia. It has been because of this proactive approach, this initiative and the associated policies that we are one of only four countries in the world on track to reach our Kyoto targets.

So this criticism that we have somehow been sitting on our hands and doing nothing is completely unfounded. The \$2 billion worth of programs, a range of programs, that we have in the pipeline includes research on alternative energy types and, critically, research into clean coal technology and ways to ameliorate greenhouse gas emissions of the fossil fuel industry. It includes research into renewables and for the open-minded debate about the issue of nuclear energy. The fact is that this government has been putting its money where its mouth is to address these issues.

The other criticism that I have had from a number of people in my electorate is that we have not ratified Kyoto and therefore we cannot be serious. The point that needs to be remembered, and the evidence shows it clearly, is this: Kyoto really is a feel-good excuse for doing nothing. So many countries in the world that have signed Kyoto have thought: 'Well, we've done our bit. We've signed a bit of paper. We're okay on the whole issue of climate change; our conscience is clear.' It is not what you say or write; it is what you do that matters. Many of those countries that have signed the document and ratified Kyoto pat themselves on the back and say, 'What good boys we are: we've ratified Kyoto,' are failing to meet their targets. They are 10 per cent, 20 per cent and, in some cases, 30 per cent above their Kyoto targets, whereas Australia is delivering—ours is one of only four countries to be on track with meeting our Kyoto targets, because it is what we do and not what we say that matters.

The other point that needs to be made is this: if Australia were to sign Kyoto and the major emitters of the world—China, India and the US—do not ratify Kyoto, it would make no difference. Australia only contributes 1.4 per cent of the world's greenhouse gases. We need a program and a commitment from the major emitters: China, USA and India. This is why it is so important that Australia is leading the charge on clean coal technology and exporting that technology to countries like China to help them reduce their greenhouse gas emissions. It is this that matters.

The International Energy Agency estimates that in 30 years time 70 per cent of the world's power will still be generated by fossil fuels; therefore, it is absolutely imperative that Australia continues to take the lead with research into clean coal technology to reduce the impact of the emissions of those larger emitters like China, India and, to a lesser extent, in this regard at least, the US. Australia is doing its part and will continue to do its part. (*Time expired*)

Question agreed to.

**House adjourned at 9.25 pm**

### NOTICES

The following notices were given:

**Mr Fitzgibbon** to move:

That the House expresses concern that the Government's mismanagement of the Defence budget and Defence procurement policy is undermining Australia's national security.

**Mrs Elliot** to move:

That the House:

- (1) notes that:
  - (a) since the abolition of the Commonwealth Dental Program, waiting lists for dental services have increased dramatically;
  - (b) an increasing number of Australians are unable to afford private dental treatment and are waiting years for dental care; and
  - (c) poor dental health can contribute to a deterioration in overall health; and
- (2) calls on the Government to:
  - (a) acknowledge that the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Health and Ageing inquiry of November 2006, *The Blame Game*, recommended that the Federal Government should fund dental services;
  - (b) reinstate a Commonwealth dental program; and
  - (c) end the 'Blame Game' and work cooperatively with the States and Territories to ensure that services are delivered.

**Mr Cadman** to move:

That the House condemns the New South Wales Government for presiding over the highest amount of State and local government taxes and charges levied on the cost of a new home and for having the largest shortfall of broad hectare land provision of any State or Territory—putting the dream of home ownership out of the reach of New South Wales families.

**Mr Bartlett** to move:

That the House:

- (1) recognises the pressures of an ageing population;
- (2) acknowledges the enormous contribution made by senior citizens throughout their working lives;
- (3) recognises the need to provide quality care for the frail aged in our community;
- (4) welcomes the progress made in this area in recent years; and

- (5) welcomes the Government's recently announced package of further measures to help provide community-based and residential care for our frail aged.

**Ms Kate Ellis** to move:

That the House:

- (1) supports a universal right to early learning for all Australian four-year-olds through the introduction of an entitlement to 15 hours of play-based learning per week, for a minimum of forty weeks per year, delivered by a qualified teacher;
- (2) is committed to providing extra financial assistance to build additional childcare centres on primary school grounds and other community land in partnership with childcare providers;
- (3) calls on the Government to increase the number of fully-funded university places in early childhood education to address the shortage of childcare provision across Australia;
- (4) calls on the Government to introduce a 50 per cent HECS remission for 10,000 early childhood graduates working in areas of need;
- (5) calls on the Government to eliminate TAFE fees for childcare trainees; and
- (6) supports the transfer of responsibility for early childhood education and childcare into the Commonwealth Department of Education, Science and Training with a new Office of Early Childhood Education.

**Ms Annette Ellis** to move:

That the House:

- (1) notes:
  - (a) the growing incidence of, and pressures on, grandparents being called on to resume the role of parenting of grandchildren, resulting from family tragedies, family breakdown, or the devastating impacts of drug or alcohol abuse;
  - (b) the tremendous role that many community organisations and support services play in highlighting these issues, seeking funding support for services; and
  - (c) the fundamental role grandparents are playing in holding many family units together and their struggle to provide a safe, secure and supportive environment for their grandchildren;
- (2) acknowledges:
  - (a) the support currently provided by government departments and agencies;
  - (b) the contribution of peak organisations around Australia, including research and reports developed by such bodies as Families Australia (*Grandparenting: Present and Future*, January 2007) and in the ACT, the Canberra Mothercraft Society Inc (*Grandparents Parenting Children because of Alcohol and other Drugs*, 2006); and
  - (c) that these organisations are doing a great service to families in these circumstances by their calls to achieve substantive improvements in quality of life for grandparents and the children in their care by

advocating for legislative recognition of these particular family units and their unique situations;

provide transitional arrangements when making changes such as this.

- (3) recognises, when considering the key issues faced by grandparents raising children:
  - (a) the need for relevant, current and accessible information as soon as children arrive as resources developed by community organisations rapidly become out-of-date as such organisations often lack funding for ongoing updates and reprints;
  - (b) the potential for significant financial hardship and compromise when they take on parenting of grandchildren, including the often limited financial resources of grandparents and the hardship and challenges they face in making a suitable home and supporting children's needs;
  - (c) the need for access to affordable legal services and support;
  - (d) that parenting over the age of 55 has significant health impacts, exacerbated when grandparents are faced with the unexpected physical and emotional toll of caring for children who are often struggling themselves as a result of the circumstances they came from;
  - (e) the significant contribution grandparents make to the social capital of their community and our nation, the isolation and, sometimes, the stigma felt by grandparents and grandchildren in these circumstances and the relative scarcity of natural peer support and community linkages available to grandparents caring for children; and
  - (f) the need for further research to identify the extent of grandparent families, particularly indigenous grandparent families; and
- (7) calls on the Government to seek further departmental improvements in response to these issues, including consideration of peak body representations in the areas of:
  - (a) accessibility of relevant information and advice;
  - (b) consideration of financial implications;
  - (c) legal complexities and costs;
  - (d) health impacts on grandparents and children;
  - (e) impact on grandparents and their contribution to society; and
  - (f) the need for further research.

**Mr Bowen** to move:

That the House:

- (1) notes the decision by the Federal Government to end upfront tax deductions for investors in non-forestry agribusiness Managed Investment Schemes (MIS);
- (2) notes the impact of this announcement on rural investment and job losses;
- (3) condemns the Government for its lack of consultation on the proposed tax treatment of non-forestry agribusiness MIS with the agribusiness industry; and
- (4) notes the Government's pretence that it is the 'party of business' while it flagrantly disregards the need for certainty in relation to investment decisions and the need to



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Monday, 12 February 2007

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The **DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Jenkins)** took the chair at 4.00 pm.

**COMMITTEES**

**Communications, Information Technology and the Arts Committee**

**Report**

Debate resumed.

**Mr HAYES** (Werriwa) (4.00 pm)—I was very honoured to participate in this House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts inquiry into community broadcasting. This *Community television: options for digital broadcasting* report is a significant piece of work. In 2005 an inquiry into the take-up of digital TV was undertaken by this same committee. During that inquiry the committee learnt of the plight, quite frankly, that community television was in at that stage and how it would be impacted by the digitisation of free-to-air television transmission.

In 2006 an inquiry was launched by this committee into community broadcasting issues. It was decided during that inquiry that a report be produced by the committee that addresses the issues confronting community television in respect of the use of spectrum and the impact on their businesses. The recent announcement by the government concerning the proposed use of previously unused digital channels has concerned the community television sector about the options they will have as they move into digital transmission. This committee attempted to drill into that with a view to establishing the most realistic options that could be reasonably expected by government for community television. The government has on a number of occasions announced its commitment to community television.

*A division having been called in the House of Representatives—*

**Sitting suspended from 4.03 pm to 4.16 pm**

**Mr HAYES**—Just before the sitting was suspended I was indicating that the government has for some time stated that it had an ongoing commitment to community television. As a matter of fact, former Senator Alston, in his second reading speech on the Television Broadcasting Services (Digital Conversion) Bill 1998, indicated:

The government will also continue to support community broadcasters and will facilitate the transmission of community television broadcast services, free of charge, in ... datacasting services.

With time, and also with the government's production in March 2006 of the digital action plan, time is now rapidly running out for the digitising of broadcast services for community television. During the inquiry the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia indicated that, without making provision for community television here and now, the financial viability of ensuring digitised access for community television will be threatened. Therefore, it should be a matter of some priority for the government.

At this stage community television is only broadcasting by way of analog signal, even though 23 per cent of Australian households currently have already converted to digital transmission. According to the Community Broadcasting Association, there are now in the vicinity of 40,000 set-top boxes being sold per month, which is further enhancing people's move to digitisation. It is community television's on-air time which allows it to attract sponsorship. Therefore, if it is, in effect, losing its audience reach during this simulcast period while commercial television has already been transmitting, and the audience is moving to digital television, it is fair to conclude that community television will increasingly be missing out on its audience share.

That is why it is so crucial for this committee to look specifically at the issues facing community broadcasters. As I say, there is a need to keep them viable so that they can keep fulfilling a need within society, and to be able to do so on the basis that they are not commercial stations and do not have the ability to fairly make the same adjustment that commercial television can make.

A set of recommendations is made in this report. The committee is very much of the opinion that simply to maintain access for community television to a reserve channel of a licensee might be appropriate for the purpose of simulcast. Unless community TV has the same ability as free-to-air commercials—that is, the ability to simulcast—they will continue to lose their share of audience. That is why the committee took the view that the government's digital action plan, which suggests that a long-term commercial arrangement should be entered into with the purchaser of the reserve licence, would be detrimental to the long-term future of community television. The committee was very strong in this view and recommended that the Australian government sell the unreserved channel which is now known as channel A, with an obligation on the new licensee to carry commercial television during the simulcast period. Such carriage should be at no cost to the community TV sector during the period of that simulcast period.

Any significant delays that will occur in the sale of that channel A would again amount to a loss of audience and therefore revenue for the community TV sector. The committee therefore recommends that a sale of licence A should be completed by no later than 1 January 2008; otherwise, penalties should apply to the new licensee in their ability to carry community TV.

However, in the event that the government is not able to sell licence A and therefore not able to accommodate the community TV sector in terms of broadcasting, the committee is of the view that a temporary arrangement should be made for the use of that spectrum within the licence A to be carried by a national broadcaster for the specific purpose of broadcasting community TV only during the period of simulcast. This is an attempt by the committee to make sure that community television has a future in this country and it is to ensure that they can participate and properly be able to join digital transmission without losing audience share. I would suggest that this is in everybody's interest. It certainly accommodates what the government has, since 1998, been saying it is committed to.

I say in concluding that this is a unanimous report by the committee. It has taken the committee into various aspects of community television. It is one which genuinely recognises the need for and future of community television in this country. I commend the chair, the member for Lindsay, and the committee. The staff of the committee I think have put together a report which truly reflects a bipartisan position in this matter.

**Miss JACKIE KELLY** (Lindsay) (4.23 pm)—I thank the member for Werriwa for his support in the preparation of the Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts report *Community television: options for digital broadcasting* and for his keen interest and contributions throughout the taking of evidence. I note that the member for Parramatta is speaking after me. Similarly, she has been a great contributor to and attendee of the meetings that we have had to take evidence and to prepare the draft of this report.

The terms of reference given to the Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts by the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts were to investigate and report on:

The scope and role of Australian community broadcasting across radio, television, the internet and other broadcasting technologies;

Content and programming requirements that reflect the character of Australia and its cultural diversity;

Technological opportunities, including digital, to expand community broadcasting networks; and

Opportunities and threats to achieving a diverse and robust network of community broadcasters.

In those terms of reference the minister recognised that it was in Australia's interests to have a diverse and robust network of community broadcasters. In the last 12 months of taking evidence it became clear that community television really needed spectrum to jump to in the transition to digital and this has not been clarified. Over the course of our inquiry it became apparent that various avenues were being lost to them as the ABC and SBS started multichannelling and fully utilised the available spectrum. The commercial sectors obviously had theirs full with simulcast, and the pay TV channels were full and expensive; they were very expensive for community players to access. The community channel on pay TV was different from community TV as we know it on the free-to-air.

When the government announced that channel A was to be sold by the end of 2007, the committee decided that it would be helpful to the minister if we delivered our findings on the community television sector early in 2007 for consideration in the sale process. Hence this report is being presented now. We have reserved a subsequent report which will cover community television governance, sponsorship, fundraising activities and all the other things that impact on this very important sector. We will deliver that report later in the year. We will also deal with radio and the other matters contained in the terms of reference. It was felt important that we get this report out early so that the minister could take notice of our deliberations in organising the transition of community television to the digital age.

The industry was launched in the late 1980s, when there were just test broadcasts, and then there was the launch of Channel 31 in Melbourne about nine years ago. It was set up from a university base and seemed to have the right governance structure in place that allowed the station to really launch. It has seen a number of innovative programs. At our inspection of Channel 31 in Melbourne, a most interesting point for me was that one of its most popular programs was a program for the over 65s. It is something you would not find a commercial network running for an hour on commercial TV, but it is something that is very important to our elderly population, who are increasingly isolated in their homes. People on a pension can find their financial wherewithal leaves them feeling isolated when they leave work. They cannot afford gym fees and they cannot afford to take part in many of the social activities that they did to stay fit. For retirees who live in unit dwellings and city areas, being able to undertake moderate exercise in their own home for an hour a day in front of the TV is something that they would much appreciate. This type of innovative, experimental program—putting something to air and saying, 'Look what is out there,' and watching it grow—is something that happens in the community sector. It is something that used to

happen with SBS and ABC, but more and more we find the ABC is not interested in being the nursery for industry talent for the commercials. The ABC has a different operational approach. More and more we are seeing the commercial sector and the ABC and SBS raiding the community television sector for ready-trained talent, be it behind camera, within production or in front of camera.

This report, as I mentioned earlier, comes at a critical time when the decisions are being made about spectrum allocation. You see the commercial broadcasters really expanding their services and exploring all the possibilities of digital transmission. I think it is important that we allow community television the same opportunities—hence the recommendation to allow a full channel to the sector. That does not mean the current incumbents get the full channel, but it does enable a case to be made. If they say they want to put out an electronic program guide or if other players want to come into the market with different services and innovation, they should not be precluded in any future division of spectrum, so that, in future, community television will have the same proportion of spectrum use as the commercials.

I think government should be looking at the return of spectrum from the commercial players, and from the ABC and SBS, before it looks at the return of spectrum from the community sector. That was one of the key drivers behind why the committee felt it was important at this time to recommend that the full seven-megahertz channel be reserved for community use—not just for incumbents' use but for community use.

We have seen a number of innovations in community broadcasts—not just on the internet with YouTube but all sorts of innovations. In fact, recently I have even seen politicians advertising themselves on YouTube; for instance, I have seen that Peter Debnam, the opposition leader in New South Wales, is reaching out on YouTube—a bit like the Blue Wiggle! But when you get politicians moving to community broadcasts to send a message across, clearly those broadcasts have a listenership and an audience and their needs are worthy of a government response.

Likewise, I think you will see this type of growth in community TV. It is absolutely a given—they call it 'Gates' law'—that the cost of this technology will be halved while the capability is doubled every six months. So the time is not far away when we will be able to produce television shows in our living rooms, and the opportunities for uploading them—

*Mrs Gash interjecting—*

**Miss JACKIE KELLY**—Yes, Jo! The member for Gilmore is having a chuckle with me over the thought that we could be putting our own ads to air—producing television ads here in Parliament House and uploading them on a number of different platforms! And heaven knows—if they are of good enough quality they might get to air on a community television station.

That is clearly an interest that people have. They no longer want to be the passive recipients of what the production networks think they want. More and more we see the commercials going to talkback and to instant feedback over the digital network and drafting and scripting their programs to run along the lines of, 'What do the viewers we have captured want to see and who do they currently want to hear from?' It is a small step from that to saying, 'Here, I have produced this; put it to air.'

There is exciting new growth—major growth. And if the growth in the last decade in the community television sector is repeated in the next decade, someone standing here in this Main Committee giving a similar report 10 years from now will be saying some remarkable things about the sector. I predict that the growth will probably be twice what it has been in the last decade. I commend the report to the House.

**Ms OWENS** (Parramatta) (4.33 pm)—I rise to speak to the report by the Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts titled *Community television: options for digital broadcasting* and, like the member for Werriwa and the member for Lindsay, I am extremely proud to do so for the following reasons. Firstly, the community broadcasting sector is one I had quite a bit to do with in my pre-parliament professional life and is one that I have become quite fond of; secondly, I share its belief that providing communities the opportunities to share information with each other, to share stories and to develop views at a grassroots level through the media, is an essential service which must run in parallel with commercial broadcasters as part of our long-term media landscape; and, thirdly, this report, which is extremely well-thought-through and generous, is about a sector of our nation that has worked tirelessly for 30 or 40 years to build the strong community broadcasting sector that we all enjoy today.

I would like to express my thanks to the other members of the committee—particularly the chair, the member for Lindsay, Jackie Kelly—for the work they have done in preparing this unanimous report. We argued, we even fought at times and in the final result I think we made recommendations that go further than the government has made in the last few years. I would like to thank my fellow committee members for being prepared to move so far. I would also like to thank the secretariat. We are blessed in this House by having access to some of the most fabulous staff you can have, people who are absolutely committed to being fair and bipartisan. You can see in the work

that they did through this process how much they came to care for the community and the issues they were dealing with, yet in front of us is an incredibly balanced and well-written report. It really is an extraordinary job and we should thank them fully for the incredible quality of their work.

The plight of the community television sector in gaining access to digital spectrum is now pretty dire. The Standing Committee on Communications, Information Technology and the Arts believes that urgent action is required. This became clear to the committee through its two most recent inquiries: the 2005 inquiry into the uptake of digital television in Australia and the inquiry into community broadcasting which commenced in January 2006 and is ongoing. Because of the urgency, we are delivering the special report specifically into community television and the conversion to digital; the full report into community broadcasting will be delivered later this year.

The urgency is caused by the transition from analog television broadcasting to digital. The transition period has been going for about 10 years now and is still under way. For much of the last few years, the commercial sector and national broadcasters have been simulcasting in analog and digital, so that as members of the community buy a set-top box or a digital television, they can still get commercial television and national broadcasters and they get an improvement in the quality of the broadcast.

The community television sector however does not have enough spectrum to simulcast. It broadcasts still in analog. So as members of its audience in their homes convert to digital, they no longer have easy access to the community television channel. They could if they knew their way around the technology, put the pieces together and run a few cables on their remote so that they could switch when they wanted to. But the reality is that most people do not know enough about that and when people switch to digital they effectively lose access to community television. That means, as 20 per cent of the population has now switched, 20 per cent of the population no longer has access to digital. As that percentage increases through this transition period, community television effectively is getting locked out of the market and the rest of the television sector is gaining that digital audience share.

There has been a suggestion in the past that community television could cope with a cold switch, that on the day that analog was switched off, it could then convert to digital on the same spectrum that it has now. What that effectively would mean is that community television would see its audience dwindle to less than 15 per cent of the market and then have to start literally from scratch in the digital world. Without any doubt, this would mean the death of community television. It is a sector restrained by its licence in the ways it can earn revenue. It survives on imagination, hard work and small revenue streams. It simply could not sustain the complete loss of its market over 10 years and then start again from scratch.

We are talking about a significant sector. A lot of people do not realise exactly how big it is. We really do not know exactly how big it is across the whole country. There are four full-time CTV licences—Sydney, Brisbane, Perth and Melbourne—with trial services in Adelaide, Lismore and Mount Gambier. Channel 31 in Melbourne alone has 40 affiliated member groups which represent a variety of communities. That one channel in Melbourne has 1.3 million viewers tuning in every month—in Melbourne alone. That is bigger than some of the more well-known cable channels. This extraordinary television sector has done incredibly well under some very difficult circumstances.

The sector is also responsible for a large part of the training for the commercial sector. The commercial sector openly acknowledges that, as training within television stations and the national broadcasters has reduced, it is picking up more and more of its technical and on-air talent out of the community sector. We all know of the more famous one—Rove McManus, who came out of Channel 31 in Melbourne.

It is important that we get the recommendations right for this sector. It is extremely urgent because the options have been shrinking as more and more of the spectrum has been allocated to other uses. It became clear late last year that licence A, which is being auctioned off this year, is the last remaining real option for community television to be able to simulcast in digital. If that last piece of remaining spectrum is sold without providing access for community television, community television will be locked into analog and analog alone until the spectrum is freed up again at switch-off. So it became urgent for us to make a recommendation that community television get access to digital spectrum, and that is what we have done.

The committee has made five recommendations. The first one is that the Australian government sell the unreserved channel known as licence A with an obligation to be placed on the new licensee to carry community television during the simulcast period. This means that, once that licence is up and running, community television will be able to simulcast on their existing Channel 31 in analog and on licence A in digital. We have introduced some penalties should the carrier not meet its obligations. We have also introduced conditions that recognise how urgent this is. If licence A does not sell before the end of 2007 with a 'must carry' then sufficient spectrum will be temporarily allocated to one of the national broadcasters on a 'must carry' provision and the national broadcaster will be

compensated for the additional costs. Both of those recommendations are necessary, again because of the urgency. In May last year community television were openly saying that they thought they may survive another year. That year is almost up. They really are in desperate need of our assistance.

We also recommended that, on the date of switch-off, the existing spectrum known as Channel 31—all seven megahertz of it—become available to community television. That will allow community television to expand in the digital world. The original government commitment made back in 1988 and then again in 2001 and 2004—in fact, over nine years—was to provide one channel. We have gone further than that and suggested that community broadcasting in all its forms—and we do not know what it will look like yet in the new world—be given the same opportunity to explore, grow and innovate that the commercial and national broadcasters have been given, and that is seven megahertz. We have also suggested some funding. (*Time expired*)

Debate (on motion by **Mrs Gash**) adjourned.

## BUSINESS

### Rearrangement

**Mrs GASH** (Gilmore) (4.43 pm)—I move:

That order of the day No. 1, committee and delegation reports, be postponed until the next sitting.

Question agreed to.

## COMMITTEES

### Family and Human Services Committee

#### Report

Debate resumed from 7 December 2006, on motion by **Mrs Bronwyn Bishop**:

That the House take note of the report.

**Mrs IRWIN** (Fowler) (4.44 pm)—I rise today to speak on the report of the Standing Committee on Family and Human Services inquiry titled *Balancing work and family responsibilities*. I do so with a feeling of great disappointment. I say that because I think all members of the committee participated in the inquiry with genuine enthusiasm. This was going to be a report into the most important issue in the lives of so many Australian families and, as I will discuss later, an important matter for the Australian economy as well.

Parliamentary committees play a special role. I know from my experience that members often begin an inquiry with very different views but in the course of the inquiry both sides move closer to recommendations which can be agreed on. Consensus is more often than not the outcome of inquiries. But I regret to say that, in the later stages of this inquiry, there was a breakdown in the accord that had existed and, in the end, members of the committee went their own ways. Labor members have taken the step of including a dissenting report which, given the very limited time that we had to put it together, expresses the very different views held by the Labor members of the committee.

This is in no way a bipartisan report. The process of deliberation on the report excluded Labor members from the most important recommendations. The end result is an ill-considered report which flies in the face of the expert advice contained in the Econtech report—a report commissioned by the committee at a cost of \$17,000. It is now clear that the committee chair had already reached the conclusion that we see in recommendation 18—that is, allowing tax deductions for child care. The consultants were asked to look at the effect of replacing the current 30 per cent rebate for child care with a general tax deduction and extend the fringe benefits tax exemption for employer funded child care. That report found that this would cost \$500 million a year, with an increase in income tax collected of only \$1 million or a net cost of \$499 million. Less a saving from removing existing arrangements, the net cost would be \$218 million.

Econtech also found that low-income earners would decrease their hours worked and be worse off. The chair went back to Econtech to change the model. This time she wanted the childcare benefit to remain and parents to be given the option of claiming the childcare tax rebate or a tax deduction. The result was that the cost blew out to \$262 million. The committee report concludes that this is affordable and believes that a significant number of Australians will be better off. But the Econtech report makes it clear that tax-deductible child care only leaves parents on incomes above \$75,000 a year better off. There is no benefit to families with lower incomes. The greatest benefit goes to those on incomes above \$150,000 where a higher marginal tax rate applies. While the childcare tax rebate is capped at \$12,000 a year, the recommendation does not cap deductible childcare expenses. If nanny care is deductible, as the report recommends, the greatest benefit will go to those families who can afford the high cost of nanny care. This is nothing but welfare for the wealthy.

The report does say that the cost to revenue should be regarded as investing to stimulate greater full-time female participation, and particularly targeting tertiary-qualified mothers to rejoin the full-time workforce. But it ignores the fact that full-time tertiary-qualified nurses and teachers with incomes of less than \$75,000 would not benefit at all.

I take this opportunity to say to the member for Mackellar that I personally agree with much of her view that child care should be considered tax-deductible, but as I have just said, that would lead to greater benefit going to higher income earners. The member for Mackellar does attempt to justify that proposal, but I cannot accept that higher income families should pay less than middle-income families for child care. I can agree to tax deductibility so long as it is capped at the same rate as the childcare rebate, which is capped at the 30c in the dollar rate. For that matter, I can even accept other forms of child care, such as employed nannies and, to some extent, where their position is strictly related to child care, I could even accept au pair arrangements, subject to appropriate qualifications and defined working conditions. But, as I said, I could only accept those arrangements if there was a cap on the amount that could be claimed as a tax deduction, and that cap would be equivalent to the childcare tax rebate. I did not have the opportunity to put that proposal to the committee. We may never know if my suggestions might have been accepted by a majority of committee members. That is part of the opportunity that was lost through the rushed deliberations on this report, and it was not the only lost opportunity.

The focus on government assistance for child care left some of the more important issues out in the cold. The most important of these is the question of flexibility for working parents. The report suggests that the government's Work Choices legislation provides the basis for flexibility in work hours. But the evidence given to the committee suggests that much stronger initiatives must be taken to give real flexibility to working parents. Opposition members were attracted to the right-to-request laws in Britain. While we have not yet seen the results of these laws, they do recognise that flexibility is a two-way street. Parents must be able to request flexible work conditions without prejudice. As we face severe skill shortages, more and more employers will be forced to re-think the flexibility of their work operations and the need to fit in with the family requirements of their employees. We may need a legislative framework to give greater certainty to all working families.

The second issue of flexibility is that of child care. There is an ongoing debate in this country about the need for more child-care places. I find that strange, when I get fliers in my letterbox telling me of vacancies at child-care centres in Western Sydney. When I speak to mothers about access to child care, they tell me about shortages on particular days and the impossibility of getting care at short notice. Where a parent may be asked to work an additional day in a week, they often have to refuse because there is no vacancy at their child-care centre on that day. Casual and part-time workers can find their life thrown into chaos if they are asked to change their work roster. They cannot change their child care as easily as an employer can shuffle work rosters.

Another issue which was not given the consideration it deserved was the interaction of the range of family assistance measures. If the committee had modelled the cut-off for family tax benefit part A, it would have found that it produces an effective marginal tax rate which is a disincentive for working parents, such as teachers and nurses. I know from the experience of my own daughter, who is a teacher, that she is better off working two days a week rather than three. If she increased her working hours by 50 per cent she would be worse off. But these issues are not addressed in the report.

Balancing work and family issues is important to our nation, not just for the barbecue-stopper effect on families; it is crucial to the economy. The Access Economics research shows that increasing female participation in the workforce can produce greater economic growth than tax reform and almost as much as national competition policy. This is the real challenge that the report overlooks. If we do not get the policy right when it comes to balancing work and family, our economy will suffer. We will find ourselves facing severe shortages in many areas of skill. I mentioned the nursing and teaching professions—both areas where a large proportion of the workforce is approaching retirement. Getting the right policy settings to maximise the participation of parents with young families is crucial to achieving this outcome, but this report cannot be taken as a serious contribution to that policy debate. Sadly, this report looks at gimmicks rather than solutions. It has been a wasted opportunity.

I add my thanks to the outstanding committee staff. They worked hours that were far from family friendly. We are fortunate to have highly skilled and dedicated staff to advise and assist our parliamentary committee, but we must manage those resources effectively to get the full benefit of their contribution. (*Time expired*)

**Mr CADMAN** (Mitchell) (4.54 pm)—I could not disagree more with the previous speaker about the value of this report. It contains a heap of invaluable information. Evidence and submissions have been gathered Australia wide and they say a range of things that are a rich resource for anybody interested in developing the policies relating to families, particularly the relations between families and the workplace. So I am delighted to speak to this report.

Of course there were varying opinions about what would be the best results for families with children—particularly children under the age of five, because it emerged that generally around Australia, where children are of school age, the parents can make easier decisions. It is the under-five-year-olds who need the attention of policy makers and for us to provide the easiest opportunity for families with children. In particular, I guess most families look at the option for the female partner to participate in the workplace. From all the research that we saw during the inquiry, this is the point of greatest stress within families: just balancing that relationship—usually with the mother—between the needs of the children and the need to work.

I do not think we really investigated why mothers work. There are a range of reasons and they are obvious. Fulfilment and personal development are important. Providing additional finance into the family is significant. There are a whole range of reasons that vary from family to family. So to try to prejudge what is best in each individual situation from a policy making point of view is something that is likely to lead to a judgemental approach or a rigid approach that restricts the choice generally available to mothers. But the situation is no different where the father is the one who is the caregiver for young children. The evidence indicates that both of them experience the same sorts of problems in managing the needs of young children, the needs of the family and their own personal aspirations or personal fulfilment.

So the conclusion that I reached very early in the inquiry was that to give maximum choice in each individual situation was the most desirable policy outcome that we could achieve. And, in part, the committee achieved that. There are a lot of ideas about how this can be done. Unfortunately, the member for Fowler seems to have taken—as she does with a number of reports—objection to some of the presentation of the report. She usually does that at the last minute, and that is a great shame because she made a valuable contribution during the discussion and formulation of the report and its recommendations. But in this instance it was obvious that to give mothers in particular absolute maximum choice and flexibility in the decision between working and being at home with young children was the key both to happy families and to the maximum productivity in the workplace.

In those countries internationally where that flexibility is available, the workforce numbers of women have increased rapidly. Their involvement in the workforce is at a maximum and yet their care of children is also at a peak. So we have the desirable combination of these two things, where women have maximum participation in the workforce and maximum care of their children at home. Those figures internationally are irrefutable.

So this committee set out to put forward a number of proposals for government consideration. Non-formal care figured, in-home figured, formal care was considered, the normal preschool care was considered. All the prospects and ranges of family day care, long day care, short day care, were all canvassed by the committee and evidence taken. The result of that evidence is set out in the report in the recommendations also. The concept of tax deductibility is canvassed and presented. The concept of in-home care is canvassed and presented.

I came to a conclusion, a little differently to most committee members—and my views are expressed in part of the report—that it would be best indeed if we were to provide for families the capacity, where the children are under the age of five, to be able to increase the family tax rebate part A. By that we apply a means test to the process and we allow maximum benefit to those families choosing to use non-formal care. The government's programs at the moment restrict benefits basically to formal care of children. No doubt the educators in our midst would say that that is the best—kids under the age of five need to be educated. I do not believe that that is necessarily the wish of all parents, because many of them prefer children to have a delightful infancy where there is not too much formal structure but a socialising program within their lives whereby through experience they gain knowledge and exposure to others.

So, in my view, the most desirable approach with young children is where they have a loving and caring home life wherever possible and the maximum experience in socialising and in a range of environments. So the choice for parents as to the most desirable form of child care is something that should be left to the parents. We are in a somewhat prescriptive environment at the moment where government says that formal child care is the one that we will support. Probably to gain maximum result and choice, it was better to broaden that.

I consider that where there are young children in the home, if you look at the statistics and the tax, the giving and taking of various benefits—childcare rebates, childcare allowances, the impact of part A and part B of the family tax rebate—and all of the comings and goings and input of those various concessions from government, it works differently for different family compositions and income. So it is my view that, instead of trying to prescribe what should be done, we should make the choice factors important.

What has happened is that for mothers working more than about 15 hours per week, the loss of benefits almost equals their income provided it is a modest income. High fliers—barristers and people like that—can survive. They can pay the high family care rates. But for the average family, a family that could be called, say, the policeman and the hairdresser, the cost of child care can be quite expensive. What people do—and I have spoken to

many—is use relatives for part care: they may use formal care for part of their needs and long day care or some other form. Some of these forms of child care are not supported by government policies, and this report raises the need for government to broaden the recognition of child care such as in-home care, family care where there is a registration process so that, in fact, a reasonable and appropriate form of child care can be selected by parents.

To do that, some additional resources are necessary for the family. In weighing up whether it should be tax cuts or tax deductions for child care or whether it should be some other form, it comes down to the fact that it is far better to leave the choice to parents and to change the family tax benefit part A to allow families with children under the age of five to have a family tax rebate of approximately \$4,700. That will give about \$50 per week per family to be able to select the sort of child care that they want. What will that buy? That will buy the opportunity for mum to get some additional funding to look after the children or for the family long day care centre to be used. It will give maximum choice. This is an invaluable report. It provides lots of information and, unlike the member for Fowler, I welcome its tabling. I thank the chair for her contribution and the members of staff of the committee for their involvement as well.

**Mr QUICK** (Franklin) (5.04 pm)—As the longest-serving member of the Standing Committee on Family and Human Services, I have much pleasure in speaking to yet another report put out by this marvellous committee, chaired by the honourable member for Mackellar, Mrs Bronwyn Bishop. The good thing about this committee—I think it is the best committee in the House—is that we tackle the real issues, issues that impact on each and every family in Australia.

So many committees talk about esoteric things, but this committee in its report talks about work and families—something that is impacting on every family right across the nation, from southern parts of Tasmania to the Northern Territory, where we visited the defence forces. Because of the excellent work of the committee and the superb work of the secretariat, we saw it warts and all. No-one escaped our scrutiny. We put out a report and, sadly, I think it was fobbed off by the government. In marginalising the report the government said, ‘The recommendations really aren’t worthy of consideration.’ To my mind, we have been given a bit of a bum steer.

When you talk to constituents in your electorate, you find that they are under pressure to pay the mortgage. There has been a move to part-time work and the casualisation of our workforce. There is an emphasis on children staying at school longer in order to get qualifications. You virtually need to complete year 12 to become a hairdresser. Once you could leave school at 14 or 15, get an apprenticeship and be set for life. The priesthood is about the only occupation where you are guaranteed to be there until you die. Everything else is part-time, casual or contract work. Families are under enormous pressure to pay for their house, establish their family, establish a job and develop some credit rating so that they can go along to the bank and get their lives organised.

I want to cite one example. We have all been given an extra staff member. We have four now, so we have flexibility in our relief budget. I am using my extra position to enable someone that I taught in grade 6—God knows how many years ago—to get back into the workforce. Jo-Anne Munro—or Jo-Anne Leslie as she is called now, since she married—has three young children. She decided she was going to stay at home and provide her children with the resource of having a mother on hand. But the pressure on the family and the decline in the number of hours her husband was able to work meant that, like all families, they required extra income to buy a few extra things, perhaps a second car to enable her to have some flexibility.

Because her husband is working, Joanne does not qualify for support under Job Futures or Job Network, so she is on her own. She has to organise a new set of clothes and is coming to work for me a couple of days a week. She has not been in the workforce for over six years. There is no support. She has to organise child care. Once we had the JET program where, if you were returning to the workforce, there was some capacity for government agencies to at least assist you and find some child care. She lives in a far-flung region of my electorate and has to have a second car to enable her to go to work.

With the privatisation of child care, we now have a situation where, as she is interested in work, she has to organise child care and transport. It is all based on her children because she does not want the kids to be latchkey kids. She wants to be there to pick them up after school. I have arranged for her to have flexible working hours to give her that capacity. But then she comes up against the childcare bureaucracy that says: ‘If you only want a couple of hours here and a couple of hours there, we’re not really interested. It’s either half a day or a full day. Take it or leave it.’

Luckily in Tasmania we have not been inflicted with what I call the mainland disease. We have community based child care in Tasmania. It is wonderful because there is that understanding—being community based—that you ought to have the capacity to be flexible. They have some places to enable that to happen. In Melbourne, Sydney, Brisbane, Adelaide and Perth they are not interested. ABC, or whatever they call themselves these days—they are a multimillion-dollar concern gobbling up childcare centres all around the world—are in it for a buck.



One of the key things in our recommendations is that we ought to bite the bullet. Because each family is different, there ought to be different scenarios so that families can have the capacity to be productive. Joanne has not been in work for six years. She is working around her kids; she is trying to stabilise the family and give them some additional things. It is a totally different situation from that of the lawyers we met in Sydney who are earning six-figure sums. They have different needs and capacities. They might be interested in tax relief. All that Joanne wants is the opportunity to gain some capacity to get back into the workforce and earn a few extra dollars while ensuring that her kids have the same sort of mothering that they had when she was at home, while allowing her to have that wherewithal.

This report, like all other reports, is pretty bipartisan. We had some disagreements about Work Choices, AWAs, certified agreements and the like, but I think that, deep in our hearts, we were of the mind that we ought to provide each and every family, either the mother or the father, who wants to get back into the workforce with the capacity to do so. Whether it is an au pair or a nanny in some of the affluent suburbs of Sydney, whether it is tax deductibility or whether it is having flexibility in child care, all of these things ought to be made available. I am not too sure how we should do it, but for goodness sake, in this day and age we ought to be able to come up with some recommendations. I think we have done so.

As I said at the outset, I think that with this report it has been a matter of saying, 'It's all too hard; it's not in the great scheme of things.' Within the guts of this report I know there is the wherewithal to sort this problem out once and for all. If we do not sort it out, even though unemployment is down to 4½ per cent or whatever it is now, we still have tens of thousands of people who are not working at 100 per cent capacity. They want to do so; they have to do so. We heard evidence of the pressure on families to pay the mortgage, and of families breaking up because of the conflict over the capacity of one partner or the other to earn enough money to pay some of the ridiculous mortgages in the five big capital cities.

I am disappointed that more speakers, apart from those of us who are members of the committee, are not going to speak on this issue. I think that each and every member, all 150 of us, ought to be talking about this. If I could do a quick headcount, I would like to know how many of the 150 members have even bothered to read the report. We have been wandering around the country, as this wonderful committee does, taking evidence from the high fliers, from our military, and from people with basically the seat out of their pants. They are all crying out for solutions. I would urge each and every member who is not on the committee to read this wonderful report.

The committee secretariat are present in the gallery. I mentioned earlier in my speech how much we appreciate the wonderful work they have done—above and beyond the call of duty, as always. To James and the secretariat, I say thank you from the bottom of my heart. This will be my last year in this place. As I said at the outset, I am the longest-serving member of this committee. I have appreciated the camaraderie and the way you have supported us. To the chairman, I say: well done. I know you have had a few black marks against you. We have not always agreed. But, as I said, this is a wonderful report and it ought to be implemented. There should be an onus on each and every one of us to ensure that all members read it and try to ensure that something is done in order to get families into work and being productive.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP** (Mackellar) (5.14 pm)—As the mover of the original motion, I seek leave to speak without closing the debate.

Leave granted.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP**—Thank you very much. I thank the honourable member for Franklin for his words about the report *Balancing work and family*. As people listen to debate on the report, they will see that one thing in common is that everybody is passionate about the calls for child care to meet the needs of individuals, not for individuals to meet the needs of a system. I do not think ever before has such a comprehensive report been presented to the parliament, bringing together an enormous amount of evidence that we took from all around Australia, hearing from over 200 people, having over 200 submissions, having Access Economics do the macromodelling to see the impact on the economy as a whole if we saw a greater participation of women in full-time work and having Econtech do the micromodelling so that we would know the impact on the budget and on individuals.

The thing that came out loud and clear in this inquiry is that the CCB and the CCTR, which stand for childcare benefit and childcare tax rebate, which are the fundamentals of the current policy, do not meet adequately the needs of individuals who require child care. There is a need for a greater flexibility in child care—a need for the benefits that are paid to cover a greater variety of child care that suits the need of parents rather than being paid out into basically centre based care.

The value of the childcare benefit is \$1.6 billion. I will give you an indication of the way in which it is paid. ABC Learning Centres have been mentioned here, and ABC Learning Centres have become an important provider in the area of child care. They showed in their annual report that their net revenue was \$592 million, but, if you

then look at the amount of money that is paid out in CCB—and bear in mind that most of it is paid directly to a childcare centre—their share of that money is \$300 million. In other words, half of their income comes directly from the taxpayer via the CCB.

On the other hand, the childcare tax rebate has been shown to be a vast underspend. The rebate was set so that you could get a maximum rebate of \$4,000 a year. That means you would have to spend \$12,000, but you would have to spend it in such a way that it was in approved child care—that narrow definition. The bottom line is that, instead of many parents being able to claim that \$4,000 rebate, which is a 30 per cent rebate, and get it back, the average rebate paid is \$813. That is not because parents are not spending the money; it is because they are spending it on child care that suits them and their arrangements, but the government policy presently does not cover that sort of child care.

One instance of that is in-home care. There is an in-home government program for in-home care, but it is a very small program. It is dealing with parents who have multiple-birth children, people in isolation—it has very strict criteria, and there are only 7,000 families on that program. Before the inquiry, it had been frozen. I am very pleased to say that, after we brought down the report, the program was opened up again. So that was an immediate good outcome.

Clearly, the in-home care program can suit many people. It can suit shiftworkers, anyone who is a policeman, an ambulance worker, a flight attendant or a nurse—anyone who is called out at hours when centre based care is not available. For instance, there are only 21 centre based care childcare centres in the entire country that are open at weekends, but only eight of them are open on Saturday and Sunday. So automatically, out of the umpteen thousand places that are available, clearly, if you are not a regular 9 to 5 type worker, you are out of luck. Consider the pressure that is put on usually the mum, who has to get up, pack the lunches, get the kids washed and dressed, race one off to a childcare centre in one particular area, race another one off to a different area and perhaps one off to school as well. If you could arrange to have care in your home, how much easier that burden would become. So in-home care has to be an option, and it can be various families sharing. But we put in a restriction. We said the in-home carer must have a level II certificate and must be registered with the government's Family Assistance Office.

The government has another very good policy which says that if you have not finished year 12 and you are 25 or over you can get a \$3,000 voucher. With that \$3,000 voucher, you can go and get training in any number of suitable courses being taught, usually at TAFE or in the private sector equivalent of TAFE, and you can become qualified. Interestingly enough, towards the end of the inquiry I launched such a course for in-home carers. I am very pleased to tell you that I am informed by the provider of that course that it is now officially recognised by the government. You can get your \$3,000 voucher and take it to that provider and you can learn to be an in-home carer and get a level II certificate, which will mean you will qualify under the restriction in our report.

The question of tax deductibility has come up as an issue for some in giving preference to people who are greater income earners than others. For this reason the Econtech research was very important. We wanted no losers. So the recommendation is that the CCB and the CCTR remain. You can go on claiming those or you can have tax deductibility, but you cannot have both. You can choose which will suit your needs best, but it is not carte blanche. If one parent is working five days a week and one parent is working two days a week, you can only claim the tax deduction for two days, not for five, and it must be for the production of assessable income. That seems to me pretty fair.

The bottom line is that you can get a tax deduction for your computer, your steelcapped boots, your motor car and your mobile phone but not for fundamental child care, which is necessary to produce assessable income. I have to tell you that, from my mail and from the people who have contacted me, there is enormous support for this proportion because it is seen as being equitable for women. It is a fundamental equity question. But it also has enormous benefits for the economy. Access Economics said that if we see a growth in the full-time participation of women that will equate to a growth of between 2.4 and 4.4 per cent in national income, which is greater than tax reform—that is, the introduction of the GST—and just under competition policy. That is a huge benefit for the nation.

Econtech said that the total cost of implementing this policy would be \$262 million. When I look at the Treasury documents I see that already, for the year 2006-07, the underspend for child care is \$280 million. It is estimated in 2007-08 to be \$305 million and in 2008-09 to be \$330 million. That is the underspend. That figure of \$262 million is certainly affordable. When you realise that we are already returning \$16.9 billion, by way of tax deductions for which people claim work related expenses and other deductions, I reckon \$262 million is pretty affordable.

We received a very interesting paper from somebody at FaCSIA. It pointed out that, at the very least, for every dollar the government have invested in assisting parents with child care the government get back in tax \$1.86. In other words, for every dollar that they are putting into helping parents they are getting a return on that investment. That is the conservative end of the estimate. Some people say it is eight times the value.

The bottom line is that the government have done some very good things with regard to child care, but what is needed is flexibility. They admit it with regard to Work Choices. Flexibility is needed. We need flexibility so that mums in particular, but dads too, can choose what sort of care they want for their kids and can have an option in what is good for them. Thank you very much to the secretariat, who did a fantastic job, and thank you to the other members of the committee, who worked very hard.

**Ms GEORGE** (Throsby) (5.25 pm)—Ten minutes is a very short time to traverse some of the very significant issues touched on in this very important inquiry by the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Family and Human Services into balancing work and family responsibilities. The inquiry took some 18 months. There were 25 public hearings in all states. Over 200 witnesses made submissions at those hearings and on top of that there were some several hundred written submissions. It is a great pity that the possibility of coming to some bipartisan conclusions at the end of this lengthy process was derailed at the very last minute, despite the magnificent efforts of the secretariat. It is a pity that the report that comes before you, even though there is consensus about a range of very important issues, came to different conclusions and recommendations. I want to touch on some of those.

Despite great social changes, women's labour force participation continues to be far more sensitive to the presence of children than men's, thus reinforcing the historical role of women in our society as bearing the primary responsibility for managing family life, although that is changing. Though the traditional family model of the male breadwinner at work and the female homemaker at home looking after the family now represents only the minority of couple families—around 30 per cent—it is of course women who have had to make the major adjustments in balancing work and family life. We spent a lot of time debating and considering those issues and the barriers that prevent their full participation in the workforce.

It is fair to say that, in the submissions to the inquiry about the barriers to women's workforce participation, child care was probably the most commonly raised issue of all. Cost and availability figured highly, as did the need for greater choice and flexibility in child care. I agree with some of the proposals that were alluded to in the remarks of the chair, including the need for greater flexibility and greater choice in childcare provision. I think we have to move away from the one-size-fits-all model.

I continue to be amazed at comments made by senior Treasury officials and even comments made by both the Treasurer and the minister. They seem to imply that there is not a crisis in childcare provision. In fact, a recent Treasury report claimed:

... contrary to popular perceptions, there is not an emerging crisis in the sector; supply is generally keeping pace with demand and child care has remained affordable.

I think part of the problem that we have in responding to issues of genuine community concern is the apparent ability of bureaucrats at all senior levels to walk around with their ears closed and not hear what the community is saying. It is a pity these Treasury officials did not come along and hear what the witnesses were saying or did not read the submissions.

The point of view expressed to our inquiry backs up the recent findings of the Productivity Commission. So you have two reports—one from Treasury and one from the Productivity Commission—coming up with quite different conclusions. The Productivity Commission report released just a matter of weeks ago was certainly in accord with the views that we were hearing. As the chair of our committee said in the news the other day:

CHILDCARE is neither cheap nor easy to find, and the cost and scarcity of places keeps women out of the work force ... She is absolutely right.

The Productivity Commission report confirms the view not only of the chair but of everybody who participated on the committee. The report found that parents of almost 200,000 children who needed additional child care were unable to get it. The most common reason parents were seeking additional child care was work related. The main reasons parents were unable to access additional formal care were: lack of available places, 33.6 per cent; the child care was not flexible enough to meet their needs, 30.7 per cent; and it was too expensive, 16.4 per cent. I urge the Treasurer and the minister to look at those findings in the Productivity Commission report because they certainly confirm the submissions received by the committee.

We know that the average fee for centre based care is now around \$233 and that the average weekly fee in family day care is \$214 per week—and they are averages. We know from submissions that, in the inner city at least, child care can cost as much as \$110 a day. In the last couple of days, recently released ABS data shows that child-

care costs have increased substantially more than the CPI—even more than the price of bananas and fuel over the past five years. We all know as politicians the pressure that fuel and fruit costs have had on the average family household budget because we hear about it constantly from our electorates. Increases in childcare costs are outstripping increases in the price of petrol and fruit.

**Mr Danby**—Including fees at ABC Learning Centres.

**Ms GEORGE**—Yes. As my colleague says, including fees at ABC Learning Centres. The issue of family-friendly or lack of family-friendly workplaces was also aired during the course of the inquiry. This is an issue on which there was a divergence of opinion which led to different recommendations being proposed. The majority believed the farcical notion that flexibility in industrial relations and individual bargaining will produce better outcomes for women, that all we need is cultural change and that we should leave it to individuals to negotiate their own arrangements. The dissenting report, with which I concur, points out the need, based on historical practice, for appropriate legislation and regulation to ensure that family-friendly provisions are spread across the board and do not just remain the preserve of professional people and people who can argue for and negotiate their own employment conditions.

Historically, in Australia, the reason why we have provisions such as parental leave, carers leave and maternity leave is because we were able to spread these benefits through running test cases before the Australian Industrial Relations Commission. With the new Work Choices legislation, we will not have the opportunity to spread such provisions across the board and people will increasingly have to rely on what they can negotiate. Reliance on individual negotiation is starkly revealed as not producing outcomes for all, when you consider that only 27.6 per cent of women who work in the private sector today are entitled to any form of paid maternity leave. Our view has always been that, in a society as wealthy as ours, in a society which needs increased participation by women at work, and in a society where demography is destiny, if we really want to be serious about our very low rates of participation by women of child-bearing age and mothers in the workforce, we need to do more.

In that regard I would draw the government's and the minister's attention to some of the suggestions that I believe should be carried out. We should expand the safety net in the Work Choices legislation to incorporate family-friendly provisions; we should guarantee the payment of penalty rates, shift loadings and overtime; we should restore the right of national test cases to be handled by the Industrial Relations Commission; we should introduce legislation along the lines of the United Kingdom part-time workers regulations which ensure that part-time workers are not treated less favourably in their terms and conditions of employment; and we should investigate the reasons for the very high levels of casual employment among women and the options for their conversion to permanent part-time work. We should support a right to request legislation which would extend parental leave and regular part-time work based on the UK model which would help families to better balance employment and domestic roles.

A lot of issues are traversed in the report. I regret that we were not able to reach bipartisan recommendations but I would urge the government to appreciate that Australia's female participation rate is only moderate by OECD standards and particularly low among mums and women over 55. It is time that the government took these issues and the concerns of the community more seriously in terms of their policy framework and the expenditure to deal with the real issues that are out there in the community.

**Mrs MARKUS** (Greenway) (5.35 pm)—I rise today to, in principle, support the recommendations. I have made a clarifying statement in the report, and I will talk about that in a few minutes. First of all, I would like to comment about the Australian government's commitment—which has already been demonstrated—to improve workforce participation and employment prospects for all Australians over their lifetimes. Workplace relations, social security and taxation policies have worked to complement a way to support Australian families. Many initiatives support Australian families over their life cycle, including those who care for others, by facilitating choice for families in their work and care arrangements. These initiatives include the maternity payment, the family tax benefit, the childcare benefit, the childcare tax rebate and funding for a range of childcare initiatives, as well as the carers allowance and payment. The maternity payment, for example, is where mothers of newborns are entitled to a non-means-tested maternity payment currently worth \$4,000 to assist them meet their parenting needs. This will increase to \$5,000 in July 2008.

In the 2006-07 budget, a number of assistance measures for families were delivered. They include \$993.3 million over four years to raise the amount that families can earn to \$40,000 before their family tax benefit part A payments begin to be affected; extension of the large family supplement to families with three or more children—previously four or more children—at a cost of \$496.7 million; \$60.2 million over four years to remove the cap on outside school hours care places and family day care places, and this was particularly significant for suburbs in outer Western Sydney; and an extra \$9.4 million in 2007-07 for jobs, education and training—JET—childcare

plus continued top-up funding of \$3.7 million per year in 2009-2010. This is a great initiative which assists parents on income support with childcare costs while they develop skills needed in the workforce.

I will talk in a few minutes about a number of the recommendations that I think the government should look at but, referring to my clarifying statement, I particularly want to say that recommendations 16 and 17, while they in part may be of benefit, may allow higher income earners or the wealthy who have the capacity to pay higher childcare costs and pay for more expensive options to get a greater tax benefit than those on lower incomes with a lesser capacity to pay for those more expensive options in child care. In principle, if this was to be looked at, I would like there to be some cap in place and some additional assistance given to people on lower incomes and those on middle incomes whose budgets may be more stretched and who will have less choice.

Looking at the recommendations, I would particularly like to highlight the second recommendation. That is significant in that it will encourage the Department of Family and Community Services and Indigenous Affairs to fund a public information campaign aimed at both men and women on the effects of age and late partnering and fertility. It became apparent from a number of submissions that this would be of great benefit. I also strongly support recommendation 3.

I want to move to recommendation 10, which says: 'As a priority, the Australian government target adults in jobless households with a goal of helping them obtain paid employment to break the cycle of disadvantage in Australia.' This government has spent more than any other government in creating innovative and supportive structures that tackle this issue with Welfare to Work and programs such as the personal support program, but this is something that we need to continually look at to see how we can creatively invest, particularly for people who have been caught in generational cycles of unemployment.

Recommendation 11 refers to in-home care. I would particularly like to focus on this because I think it is important that the in-home care program, which is already an initiative of this government, is expanded further. There has been a review on in-home care carried out by government. I think it is critical that this kind of care is more flexible and expanded in a way to meet the needs, particularly of two income families and where there are shift workers—in many cases in Western Sydney, both parents are engaged in shift work. My husband, for example, is a shift worker and my travel here I think could be called shift work. I think where two parents are trying to juggle family and shift work for an organisation, it is critical that we expand this kind of service and look at expanding how rebates and CCB is available to these families.

I also think it is important to note that one of the challenges for people accessing childcare, particularly where there is a second income and a part-time or casual employee being the second income earner, in the structured environment of a childcare centre means they often have to pay for days where they may not be working. So they have to pay and register a child for Wednesday even though they may be working only some Wednesdays. So I think in-home care, for example, may be a way where the government could expand accessibility and flexibility for these kinds of workers where they could access child care on a more casual basis. This would create further flexibility for families, particularly where the second income earner is working on a casual or even a part-time basis—a permanent part-time job—that requires them to work varying hours week to week. This increasing flexibility is called for as families and the workplace make changes and adapt to one another.

I will look briefly at recommendation 15 where it talks about fringe benefits tax being removed from all child care so that all or any childcare provision made by employers to assist employees is exempt inclusive of salary sacrificing arrangements for child care. I particularly support this recommendation. Again, I would like to reiterate that many income earners and families could benefit from a tax rebate. How this is administered with improved accessibility and flexibility for middle- and low-income earners and benefiting all families I think is critical.

**Mr FAWCETT** (Wakefield) (5.43 pm)—I rise to speak to the report, which has been tabled. Whilst many of the previous speakers have covered a range of issues, particularly those pertaining to child care—and that was certainly one of the things that came through strongly—there is another aspect to the report which is captured in recommendation 3. I plan to spend the time allocated to me today talking specifically to recommendation 3 from the report. This recommendation is that:

The Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs and the Attorney General's Department establish the following additions to the relationship education components of the Family Relationships Services program—

—that is, programs to be offered at different stages of relationships and a multimedia campaign to highlight the availability of these courses and the benefits of attending and completing them.

Why do I choose to focus specifically on this part in a report that deals with balancing work and family? It is predominantly because much of the feedback that we had from people throughout this inquiry ties in with feedback that we have had through many other forums and that is that there are a range of factors which place stress on relationships and therefore on families—so work conditions and the ability to have things like child care, the

ability to have flexibility at the workplace so that you can make adequate arrangements for your families—and contribute to stresses in families. Likewise, the strength of family and the ability to communicate within a family unit about these issues contributes significantly to a person's resilience to succeed in the workplace, stay there and negotiate for those more flexible conditions.

So the two areas are intertwined, particularly when you also look at the value of family to the community and the impact of family dysfunction and breakdown. This is a recommendation which I strongly encourage the government to take up. It is not a new idea. The government has been supporting marriage and family through its family services program for the last four decades. The program began with grants to organisations offering marriage counselling services back in the 1960s. Over the years it has expanded and developed, but also, in certain areas, it has contracted in the amount of people who have availed themselves of the service and the impact that it has had.

Probably the last serious look at this issue was in 1998 with the report *To have and to hold*, which had a look at the area of marriage in a community and some of the things that were required to keep marriages together. One of those things, in chapter 4, was looking at the factors contributing to marriage and relationship breakdown. Some of the significant and important reasons included work related problems, as well as some of the other issues around poor communication skills. What we have found through a number of studies in the United Kingdom, in Europe, America and here in Australia is that the ability for couples to communicate and to have a framework to communicate effectively is a key plank in making sure that their relationship and their marriage, for those who are married, last.

Gottman and other people who have done research in this area talk about the fact that all couples will face conflict, and that, for couples to survive that conflict and those issues, they need a framework within which they are given the motivation to work through the issues. Importantly, they need the skills to establish the framework that works for them as a family. There is a very good paper put out by the Australian Institute of Family Studies that looks at why good marriages last. This whole area of relationship education is a very important component of that.

I think it is telling that in 1998, when this report *To have and to hold* was written, FaCSIA—as it was named then—was giving \$3.5 million per annum for preventative marriage and relationship education programs. In 2003-04, the amount to the same programs was \$3.5 million. So despite the fact that the need is escalating, that there is an even greater evidence base to highlight that this is an area that will help families stay together and, importantly, help them gain the skills to balance work and family life, we have not seen a significant increase in funding.

As part of the roll out of the family relationship centres and the reform of the family law system, I am pleased to note that there was a significant boost to the Family Relationship Services Program. I have literally come to this place from a meeting with a number of providers of family relationship centres. On the one hand I am very pleased to report that their feedback is that the uptake has been very positive from a broad section of the community and that the outcomes have been positive. But on the other hand their consistent comment—not only today, but from other FRCs that I have spoken to—is that they need more investment in resources and materials. They need good quality audiovisual materials so that they can get community groups to facilitate courses in the area of communication skills, conflict resolution and the sort of relationship skills to help families cope in achieving this work-life balance. They need that, and they need another expansion of FRSP programs. They said the content is good though, so those who access it love it, it is very effective, but the amount of people who come to them seeking this is on the rise.

I strongly support recommendation 3 and, as the government considers this report, I would certainly ask that it goes back and considers a number of other reports as well as budget submissions that have gone in separately, from me and from others—including recommendations coming out of the family relationship centre task force. This has been calling consistently, for nearly a decade, for an increased investment in this area, particularly innovative ways to make sure that we capture and utilise the broad community resource that is there through community groups, through faith based groups, even in the workplace.

There are many employers, some in South Australia, who have approached me looking at how we can use resources from the family relationship centres to provide this kind of education in the workplace. They recognise that it will help employees in their workplace to manage relationships and resolve conflict, but also they recognise that, as these employees take these skills home, it will help them manage that balance of work and family life. This will not only keep the families together, but the flow-on for the employer is that they will become a more productive employee.

This is inextricably linked to the positive outcomes that this report is seeking to find pathways towards. Whilst it may not immediately appear to be a recommendation that this report would lead to, when most of the focus has

been on child care, I believe it is fundamental that the government give serious attention to this recommendation. I certainly look forward to a boost in this area.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Neville**) adjourned.

Question agreed to.

### CONDOLENCES

**Hon. Sir Robert Carrington Cotton KCMG, AO**

**Hon. Sir James Killen AC, KCMG**

Debate resumed from 6 February, on motion by **Mr Howard**:

That the House record its deep regret at the deaths of the Honourable Sir Robert Carrington Cotton KCMG AO, former Federal Minister and Senator for New South Wales and Ambassador to the United States of America and the Honourable Sir James Denis Killen AC KCMG, former Federal Minister and Member for Moreton, Queensland; and place on record its appreciation of their long and meritorious service and tenders its profound sympathy to their families in their bereavement.

**Mr JULL** (Fadden) (5.51 pm)—It is a great privilege for me to speak on this particular debate tonight. I would like to extend to Lady Cotton and to all members of her family my deep condolences. I first met Sir Robert Cotton after I had first stood for a seat in this place in 1974. The result of that election was that I was beaten, but not by many votes, and we undertook a major campaign for the next 18 months until the 1975 election came about. Sir Robert Cotton was a very great help indeed to me at that time. I appreciated his advice then, I appreciated his help then, and I certainly appreciated his advice when I came to this place early in 1976.

But, even more than during that time, it was during the period that I served as the shadow minister for tourism and aviation that I think Sir Robert and I probably came to know each other in this place. He indeed was full of advice. I contacted him on a number of occasions seeking advice when we were in the process of making policy for those various elections, when I had responsibility for those particular areas. He served Australia well, and reference has been made earlier in this debate to the tremendous contribution that he made.

But tonight I would like to speak more specifically about my mentor and friend Sir James Killen. I was very proud indeed to be asked to represent Mr Speaker at that magnificent cathedral of St John in Brisbane for Sir James Killen's state funeral. I think, frankly, that Sir James would have loved it. Madam Deputy Speaker Bishop, you were there. The music was magnificent. The deliveries by the Prime Minister, by the Hon. Gough Whitlam, by the head of Defence and by Bishop Adrian Charles were more than appropriate. I thought they were quite brilliant. The fact that 1,000 people were in the cathedral and many more were outside was a great tribute to Sir James and all he achieved.

I had known Sir James Killen for I think 42 years. I first met him when I was working as a young radio journalist and I was sent to interview him in the old Commonwealth parliament offices which were in Adelaide Street in Brisbane. In those days things were not quite as sophisticated or as comfortable as they are now. Every federal member in the Brisbane metropolitan area, I think, sat in one big room. There may have been one or two secretarial staff between all the members, and they did their business that way. There certainly was not much privacy. But, from then on, I think Sir James and I struck quite a chord.

Once again, when I first stood for parliament, he was a great help, and he was a tremendous help to me after I was elected in 1975. I remember a lot of the good advice Sir James gave me. One piece of advice has always stuck with me. Jim said, 'My boy, now that you are in this place, you have a very heavy responsibility to bring to the attention of the parliament and the government of Australia the hopes and aspirations of those people you represent.' He said: 'My first bit of advice is to never read a speech. If you haven't got the capacity to stand on your hind legs and make your case known in 10 to 20 minutes, you shouldn't be in the place.'

One of the things that I miss these days is that sheer sense and capacity of some of the orators of that generation. It was one of the great highlights of my parliamentary career to be in the House on the night that the Governor-General's address-in-reply was debated in February of 1976. The former Prime Minister Mr Whitlam gave a most magnificent, emotional and, dare I say, fierce speech. At the end of that speech, you could almost see the smoke coming out of his ears. About halfway through, the then Prime Minister, Mr Fraser, called over Killen. I was a rookie, but I sort of guessed what was going on. I think the then Prime Minister was probably scheduled to speak after Mr Whitlam, but Killen got up without a note, and it was one of the most magnificent speeches I have ever seen delivered. I would pay thousands of dollars to see an action replay of that speech again today.

Of course the story was that, after that speech, Mr Whitlam went out one door of the old Reps chamber; Killen went out the other door of the old Reps chamber, went around to the member's bar and ordered a bottle of champagne and two glasses. Sir James had been quite vicious in his dissection of Mr Whitlam's speech, but he sent around this bottle of champagne and two glasses and a note that allegedly said, 'Gough, can we still be mates?'

Allegedly, Mr Whitlam called him around and they had a very pleasant evening together. That is part of the folklore of that place.

It was good advice that he gave all young members in those days and some others too. He told me at that time that I had to do all the shopping in my family from that moment on, because you never want to be caught out by people who thought you did not know the price of a bottle of milk. I can tell you to this day the price of a bottle of milk in my supermarket. But he was that sort of politician. Despite his tremendous capacity as an orator and his tremendous knowledge of things, he was very much a grassroots politician.

He was one of the best campaigners I think I have ever seen. Traditionally, he used to open his federal election campaigns in the suburb of Rocklea. Rocklea, in a Liberal sense, would be described as real tiger country. There are two hotels there: the Rocklea Hotel and the Highway Hotel, which were on the main road. They were frequented principally by the truckers. They were good fun, and, every campaign, Jim Killen would go out there with his entourage and he would be accompanied by the Slacks Creek Band. The Slacks Creek Band was led by Mr Keith Brough, who is the father of the Minister for Family, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs in this place at the moment. The band would strike up and, of course, the interest that came out of the public bars was quite immense. Killen would get on to the microphone, campaigning on the back of trucks as we did in those days, and he would really give them some, as we would say in Queensland. Of course, there were almost riots in the hotels. Killen would make his presence felt and then go into the bars and meet these fellows, and he won them every time. He had some great friends there.

I remember that, after the 1977 redistribution, I inherited some of his territory. The Holland Park Hotel was there, and that was one of my introductions to the rough and tumble of campaigning. We would go there at 11 o'clock on a Saturday morning on the back of a truck, park straight outside the public bar with these huge speakers, and blast away for 10 minutes or quarter of an hour until everybody inside was upset. Jim could not operate if he did not have interjectors. By the time the 10 minutes was up, everybody was firing and it was all good fun. Then you proceeded to move through the bars to sign them up, so to speak. He was a tremendous campaigner. He certainly was very much on the level of the people he represented. That is reflected in really the love that is being shown since Sir James, sadly, passed away. I seek leave to continue my remarks.

Leave granted.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BK Bishop)**—The debate is adjourned and the member for Fadden will have leave to continue his remarks when the debate is resumed.

**Main Committee adjourned at 6.00 pm**



## QUESTIONS IN WRITING

### Skilling Australia's Workforce (Question No. 4752)

**Ms Macklin** asked the Minister for Vocational and Technical Education, in writing, on 11 October 2006:

Under the Skilling Australia's Workforce agreement, including the bilateral agreements and annual Vocational Education and Training (VET) plans he approves under section 7 of the Skilling Australia's Workforce Act 2005, how many:

- (a) places and
- (b) annual hour curricula (AHC) are provided for courses leading to a qualification used in the child care industry, at certificate and diploma level.

**Mr Hardgrave**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (a) Each state and territory is required to meet its share of the national targets set out in the 2005-2008 Commonwealth-State Agreement for Skilling Australia's Workforce. The Australian Government is working with all states and territories to achieve 10 000 extra training places over the life of the agreement in non apprenticeship skill shortage areas which includes the child care industry. The following jurisdictions identified Child Care as a skill shortage in their state or territory and gave the following information in Table 4 of their VET Plan which can be found at:

[http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training\\_skills/publications\\_resources/agreement/default.htm](http://www.dest.gov.au/sectors/training_skills/publications_resources/agreement/default.htm) .

Jurisdiction	Area of Qualification	Planned extra places over the life of the agreement
New South Wales	Certificate III Children's Services	13,220
	Diploma of Children's Services	12,092
Queensland	Community Services Health and Education (which includes childcare worker and childcare coordinator)	279
South Australia	Diploma of Children's Services	200
Western Australia	Certificate III Community Services (Children's Services)	34
	Diploma of Community Services (Children's Services)	30
Tasmania	Children's Services (Including Out of Hours School Care)	60
Northern Territory	Diploma of Children's Services	8
	Certificate III in Children Services	8
Australian Capital Territory	Out of School Care Certificate IV	13

- (b) This information is not available.

### Australian Universities Quality Agency (Question No. 4755)

**Ms Macklin** asked the Minister for Education, Science and Training, in writing, on 11 October 2006:

What is the Budget allocation to the Australian Universities Quality Agency for (a) the current financial year and (b) across the Budget forward estimates, and under which Budget outcome and output group is the Agency funded.

**Ms Julie Bishop**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (a) The Australian Government Budget allocation to the Australian Universities Quality Agency (AUQA) is made on a calendar year basis not financial year. The allocation for 2006 is \$1.145m.
- (b) The allocated amount for 2007, 2008, 2009 and 2010 is \$1.168m subject to indexation.

The funding is made under Budget outcome 2: "Individuals achieve relevant skills and learning outcomes from post school education and training".

The funding is via output group 2.4. – Funding for Higher Education.

It should be noted that State and Territory Governments also contribute to the operating costs of AUQA.

### Private Health Insurance (Question No. 4756)

**Mr Tanner** asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, in writing, on 12 October 2006:

- (1) Does the Government intend to require private health insurers to advise that their no-gap products apply only to some doctors and under some circumstances.
- (2) In what circumstances will private health insurers be required to advise members that a gap payment will be associated with a procedure.

**Mr Abbott**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) No. The Government is not intending to impose any additional requirements on health funds in relation to their communications with members about gap cover arrangements. The basis of gap cover arrangements is that doctors are free to choose to use health funds' gap cover arrangements on a patient by patient basis.

Members are advised to check first if the doctor or hospital will use the gap cover arrangements in their case and what the cost for the procedure will be. The health fund will then be able to advise the member the level of benefit payable under the gap cover scheme.

- (2) The Government is not intending to require health funds to advise members that a gap payment will be associated with a procedure. However, it is working with doctors and funds to increase the rate of 'informed financial consent' where patients are given information about the total cost of their procedure. As well, there will be information on how gap cover arrangements operate on the new website being developed by the Private Health Insurance Ombudsman.

### **Languages Education**

#### **(Question No. 4800)**

**Mr Garrett** asked the Minister for Education, Science and Training, in writing, on 16 October 2006:

- (1) Is she aware that the National Statement about Languages Education in Australian Schools does not include any statement of support for bilingual education for Indigenous students.
- (2) Will she consider expanding the statement to include support for bilingual Indigenous education.
- (3) What Indigenous language programs in schools are currently funded by the Department of Education, Science and Training, and in respect of each program, (a) what is the extent of the funding, (b) to what extent do State and Territory governments contribute, (c) how many students participate, (d) in which jurisdictions do the programs operate and (e) to what level of education do the programs extend.
- (4) Will she advise the progress to date, including identifying the amounts spent, on the national strategic program, including the Languages Education Working Party, to investigate Indigenous language programs operating in Australian schools.

**Ms Julie Bishop**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) The MCEETYA National Statement and Plan for Languages Education in Australian Schools 2005-2008 does not include statements of support for specific programme types, such as bilingual programmes, for any language, including Indigenous languages.
  - The Statement provides the current rationale for languages education, describes the purpose and nature of languages education and affirms the key role that it can play in the development of intercultural skills. It emphasises that all languages are equally valid in fulfilling this role.
  - The Plan provides an overarching framework for state, territory and national governments to make decisions regarding six areas of common concern: Teaching and Learning, Teacher Supply and Retention, Professional Learning, Program Development, Quality Assurance and Advocacy and Promotion of Languages Learning.

The National Statement and Plan does, however, include a distinct and explicit presence for Indigenous languages. The importance of Australian Indigenous languages to Indigenous people and the broader community is clearly acknowledged and valued in the Statement:

Australian Indigenous Languages have a unique place in Australia's heritage and in its cultural and educational life. For Indigenous learners, they are fundamental to strengthening identity and self-esteem. For non-Indigenous learners, they provide a focus for development of cultural understanding and reconciliation. The choice of which Australian Indigenous Language should be offered requires careful negotiation with Indigenous people. It also requires recognition of protocols related to language ownership, language maintenance and revival; and acknowledgement of the cultural connections and contexts of languages within Australian Indigenous communities (page 7).

In addition, an Indigenous perspective is included in the actions listed in the National Plan.

- (2) The National Statement and Plan was not developed by the Australian Government. It was developed through the Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA) during 2003-2004, following a MCEETYA Review of Languages Education in Australian Schools in 2003. The Review proposed that stronger collaboration at the national level was needed to further enhance the quality of the language learning experience and to make it a reality for all learners.

The National Statement and Plan was drafted using the comprehensive data and research that had been collected during the 2003 Review and informed by extensive consultations with key stakeholders.

A working party, which included representation from all jurisdictions, the National Catholic Education Commission, the Independent Schools Council of Australia, and the Australian Council of Assessment and Curriculum Authorities progressed the development of the National Statement and Plan.

Wide-ranging consultations were held including several meetings, a national roundtable, and drawing on expert advice from key stakeholders. The roundtable included representatives from State and Territory government and non-government education jurisdictions, academics, deans of education, other MCEETYA taskforces, principals associations, the Federation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Languages (FATSIL), and other experts in the field.

- (3) The Department of Education, Science and Training does not directly fund any languages programmes in Australian schools. Through the School Languages Programme (SLP) the Australian Government is providing approximately \$112 million from 2005-2008 to support languages education in general. The bulk (95 per cent) of funds is paid to government education authorities, Catholic Education Commissions and Associations of Independent Schools. Funds may be used to support Asian, European and Indigenous languages as well as Auslan, the sign language of the hearing impaired. Education authorities decide on the most strategic use of the funds to support languages education in their jurisdiction. States and territories also commit their own funds to support languages education.

Education authorities are required to submit a Programme Activity Report by 31 January each year that provides information on programme activities for the preceding year, including the specific amount of programme funds that have been expended on Australian Indigenous languages.

2005 was the first year this information was collected nationally. The reports received indicated that some 1.5 per cent of 2005 SLP funds nationally (\$359,177) was expended on Indigenous languages education.

- (4) From 2005 a national strategic projects element has been incorporated in the SLP to support the implementation of the MCEETYA National Statement and Plan. 5 per cent of SLP funds (approximately \$1.3 million per annum) is being reserved for national projects.

One of the projects currently being undertaken with 2005 SLP funds is an Investigation into the current provision of Indigenous language programmes in Australian schools.

The key objectives of the project are to:

- (a) obtain a comprehensive national picture of the current provision of Indigenous language programmes in Australian schools as well as teacher preparation, training and professional learning opportunities for teachers and speakers of Indigenous languages delivering or wishing to deliver such programmes;
  - (b) identify critical factors contributing to the delivery of good practice Indigenous language programmes being delivered in Australian schools in a range of settings across Australia;
  - (c) promote good practice Indigenous language programmes nationally (including the identification and promotion of at least 6 good practice examples of Indigenous language programmes operating in Australian schools); and
  - (d) make key recommendations for action that can be undertaken in the next phase of the Project to improve sustainability and quality of Indigenous language programmes delivered in Australian schools
- (4) The project commenced in August 2006 and is being conducted by the Australian Council for Educational Research (ACER), following a tender process. The total funding for the project is \$220,000 (inc. GST). To date, \$50,000 has been expended.

A Project Advisory Group has been established to provide advice during the project. This group consists of representatives from a number of stakeholder groups and includes a representative of FATSIL.

A literature review and a comprehensive mapping exercise has commenced as part of the project. The mapping exercise will determine current state and territory policies and practices relating to Indigenous languages in Australian schools, the number and types of Indigenous language programmes currently being delivered in schools in each state and territory, and how these are staffed and funded. A consultation process has been conducted in states and territories with key stakeholders and six schools have been nominated to participate in case studies of their Indigenous language programmes. The final report is due to be completed by 31 July 2007.

No funding is provided to support the MCEETYA Languages Education Working Party. Jurisdictions support their representatives' involvement. The Working Party comprises representatives from each State and Territory, the Australian Government, the National Catholic Education Commission and the Independent Schools Council of Australia.

The specific role of the Languages Education Working Party is to:

- develop an annual operational plan which prioritises actions from the Plan, according to the available budget
- reach agreement on processes and structures for monitoring and evaluating the effectiveness of the National Plan
- provide advice to DEST on its projects of national significance, from those identified in the National Plan
- seek additional funding for national projects from other sources.

The Working Party also facilitates communication and consultation within individual jurisdictions and sectors and ensures that jurisdictional/sector perspectives and positions are taken into account, and ensures that consultation occurs with key stakeholders.

### **Terrorism**

#### **(Question No. 4808)**

**Mr Bevis** asked the Attorney-General, in writing, on 17 October 2006:

- (1) How many people charged with an offence relating to terrorism were, at the time of the alleged offence, (a) Australian citizens born in Australia; (b) Australian citizens born overseas; or (c) foreign citizens.
- (2) In respect of the people identified in Part (1)b, how long had each individual resided in Australia prior to the alleged offence.

- (3) In respect of the people identified in Part (1), how many (a) were convicted of an offence relating to terrorism; (b) had been previously charged with a non-terrorism related offence or (c) had been previously convicted of a non-terrorism related offence.

**Mr Ruddock**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) According to records held by the Australian Federal Police (AFP), the numbers of people falling within these categories, as at 29 November 2006, is:
- (a) 21
  - (b) Nine
  - (c) Nil
- (2) The AFP does not hold this information.
- (3) It would not be appropriate to provide this information as there are ongoing criminal proceedings in relation to a number of these people.

### **Bankstown Airport**

#### **(Question No. 4811)**

**Mr Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, in writing, on 17 October 2006:

- (1) Has he read the media release by the Aircraft Owners and Pilots Association of Australia (AOPA) titled "General Aviation", dated 8 August 2006.
- (2) Can he confirm that the north-south runway at Bankstown Airport has been closed; if so, is the closure permanent.
- (3) Why has the north-south runway been closed.
- (4) What is his response to the assessment of AOPA that the closure of the north-south runway at Bankstown Airport is a serious safety risk.

**Mr Vaile**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) Yes.
- (2) Yes, the closure is permanent.
- (3) A survey by Bankstown Airport Limited (BAL) of over 1,300 general aviation operators using the airport found that they used runway 18/36 for less than 1% of all activity. BAL undertook significant public consultation prior to the closure of runway 18/36 in July 2005. The runway closure was widely canvassed within the general aviation industry and the local community, notably in drafting its 2005 Master Plan, which required a 90-day public consultation period.
- (4) The Civil Aviation Safety Authority (CASA) has advised my Department that there is no mandatory requirement for an aerodrome operator to provide any number of runways so that 100 per cent wind utilisation is achieved. There are many aerodromes in Australia (and world wide) that only have one runway which means that in times of extreme cross wind conditions many aircraft are unable to use these runways. CASA notes that it is the professional responsibility of pilots to ensure they have planned their flight to ensure a safe landing, taking into account expected meteorological conditions, including wind shifts.

### **Australian Technical Colleges**

#### **(Question No. 4814)**

**Mr Bowen** asked the Minister for Vocational and Technical Education, in writing, on 18 October 2006:

Was he quoted correctly in the article about the Western Sydney Australian Technical College (WSATC), which appeared in the news section of the Catholic Education Office's Parramatta Diocese website on June 23 2006, and which reported him as saying: I expect that a funding agreement will be signed within the next few weeks and I look forward to attending the college opening in early 2007; if so, (a) when was the funding agreement signed; (b) did the funding agreement stipulate when the WSATC would be open for business, if so, when will it open; (c) what trades will be offered at the WSATC; (d) when will the first class of students complete their apprenticeships; (e) how many students have enrolled at the WSATC for 2007; (f) how many teachers have been employed at the WSATC for 2007; (g) how many teachers have signed an Australian Workplace Agreement; (h) how many students will the WSATC enrol when it is operating at full capacity; and (i) at 16 October 2006, what sum has the Commonwealth spent on advertising, scoping, selecting, and finalising the funding agreement with the WSATC.

**Mr Hardgrave**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) Yes, however since then, the industry partners from the original consortium have formed a revised consortium in partnership with a different education provider.
- (a) A funding agreement to establish and operate an ATC in Western Sydney was signed with the revised consortium on 23 November 2006.
  - (b) The ATC – Western Sydney will commence in January 2007.
  - (c) The ATC will offer trade training in building and construction, automotive, commercial cookery and electrotechnology.

- (d) Apprenticeships are competency-based rather than time-based and so the time taken to complete an apprenticeship will vary.
- (e) The ATC will offer 25 enrolments in 2007.
- (f) The ATC will appoint a Principal during December 2006. Teaching services will be contracted from Rouse Hill Anglican College in 2007. The ATC will engage its own teachers in late 2007 for the 2008 school year.
- (g) All teaching staff employed by the ATC will be offered an Australian Workplace Agreement.
- (h) The ATC expects to have a maximum enrolment of 350 by 2010.
- (i) None, other than costs of Departmental Staff administering the programme.

### **Consultancy Services**

#### **(Question No. 4815)**

**Mr Bowen** asked the Attorney-General, in writing, on 18 October 2006:

Further to his response to Question No. 3914 (*Hansard*, 14 August 2006, page 115):

- (1) For the financial year (a) 2004-05 and (b) 2005-06, on how many occasions did (i) his office, (ii) his department or (iii) an agency within his portfolio, engage a consultant to assist in the preparation of a ministerial speech.
- (2) For each occasion identified in Part (1), what was the (a) company name and (b) postal address of the consultant, and (c) the cost of each speech prepared.

**Mr Ruddock**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

As I indicated to the honourable member in my answer to Question No. 3914 (*Hansard*, 17 October 2006, page 96), when a new federal judge or magistrate is appointed, and on occasion when a judge retires, the relevant court holds a ceremonial sitting at which I am invited to speak.

During 2004-05, I spoke at two such sittings where the first draft of my speech had been prepared by a consultant engaged by the Attorney-General's Department.

The consultant engaged during 2004-05 is the same consultant engaged by my Department in 2005-06 for preparation of the three draft speeches that I referred to in my answer to Question No. 3914. The consultant is not a company but an individual contracted on a fee for service basis.

In 2004-05, the cost of each of the two speeches prepared by the consultant was \$450 and \$330. In 2005-06, the cost of each of the three speeches prepared by the consultant was \$540, \$420, and \$450.

### **Bankstown Airport**

#### **(Question No. 4817)**

**Mr Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, in writing, on 18 October 2006:

Will he categorically rule out allowing regional, domestic or small international passenger aircraft to land at Bankstown Airport today or at any time in the future; if not, why not.

**Mr Vaile**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

No. The Bankstown Airport Master Plan of March 2005, outlining the proposed development of Bankstown Airport to 2024/25, indicates a potential for niche RPT (regular public transport) operations. The Master Plan is publicly available on the Bankstown Airport Limited website: <http://www.bankstownairport.com.au>.

### **Border Protection Command**

#### **(Question No. 4818)**

**Mr Bevis** asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 19 October 2006:

In respect of the Joint Offshore Protection Command (JOPC); (a) what is the fulltime equivalent number of staff; (b) how many staff are employed by (i) Defence (ii) the Australian Customs Service (Customs) and (iii) other departments and agencies; (c) what is its annual running cost; (d) what sum of the annual running cost is met by (i) Defence and (ii) Customs; and (e) do other agencies fund the JOPC; if so, (i) which agencies and (ii) what sum does each contribute.

**Dr Nelson**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (a) 165.
- (b) (i) 82.
  - (ii) 83.
- (iii) Two staff are allocated to Border Protection Command (formerly known as the Joint Offshore Protection Command) from agencies other than Defence or Customs. They represent the Australian Fisheries Management Authority, and the Department of Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry/Australian Quarantine Inspection Service.
- (c) \$98.5 million.
- (d) (i) \$6.7 million.
  - (ii) \$91.8 million.

(e) No.

**Bankstown Airport**  
**(Question No. 4822)**

**Mr Murphy** asked the Minister for Transport and Regional Services, in writing, on 19 October 2006:

- (1) What is the projected increase in air freight-related activity to and from Bankstown Airport over the next (a) five, (b) 10, (c) 15 and (d) 20 years.
- (2) Can he advise whether allowance will be made for the utilisation of larger aircraft for freight operations at Bankstown Airport over the periods referred to in Part (1); if so, what categories of jets will be allowed to land at Bankstown; if not why not.

**Mr Vaile**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) The approved Bankstown Airport Master Plan contains forecasts for freight related aircraft traffic at Bankstown Airport for the period 2005 – 2025. The approved Bankstown Airport Master Plan 2004/05 is publicly available on the Bankstown Airport Limited website: <http://www.bankstownairport.com.au>.
- (2) The approved Airport Master Plan limits the capacity of the airport to code 3C aircraft such as the BAe146, Fokker F100 and Airbus A318/319.

**Media Ownership**  
**(Question No. 4823)**

**Mr Murphy** asked the Minister representing the Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts, in writing, on 19 October 2006:

- (1) In respect of the Minister's plan to amend Australia's cross-media and foreign media ownership laws, has the Minister read an article titled 'Coonan sees no big media changes', which appeared on page 6 of *The Australian Financial Review* on 20 March 2006; if not, why not.
- (2) Can the Minister confirm that part of the report that refers to the Minister as saying: "it is difficult to see that there would be a real flurry of activity" in response to suggestions that the loosening of cross-media and foreign ownership laws would result in takeovers, mergers and the further concentration of ownership in the media industry; if not, why not.
- (3) Can the Minister confirm that she has made other public announcements to the effect that changes to Australia's cross-media and foreign ownership laws would not trigger a wave of media mergers and takeovers.
- (4) Has the Minister read the following articles published on 18 October 2006: (a) 'The big media carve-up', which appeared on page 1 of the *Sydney Morning Herald*; (b) 'Packer ready to bid for Fairfax', which appeared on page 4 of the *Daily Telegraph*; (c) 'And the winner is...James Packer', which appeared on page 2 of the *Canberra Times*; and (d) 'Stokes joins media frenzy', which appeared on page 1 of *The Australian*.
- (5) How does the Minister reconcile the apparent inconsistency between her statement that "it is difficult to see that there would be a real flurry of activity" as a result of the Government's media reforms, and the newspaper reports of 18 October 2006.
- (6) How is it in the public interest to allow a media owner to have a controlling interest in a free-to-air television station, a metropolitan newspaper, a monopoly pay-TV station, internet sites and magazines, in one market.

**Mr McGauran**—The Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

- (1) to (6) The honourable member's attention is directed to the Minister's answer to Question 4805.

**Abrams Tanks**  
**(Question No. 4827)**

**Mr McClelland** asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 30 October 2006:

- (1) Is the Army's current LCM-8 amphibious landing craft capable of transporting the new Abrams tanks.
- (2) Can the craft which will replace the LCM-8s transport Abrams tanks; if not, (a) what impact will this have on the Army's logistical capability and (b) how will any deficiency be addressed.

**Dr Nelson**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) No.
- (2) (a) and (b) The requirement to replace the LCM-8 was identified before the Tank Replacement Program was initiated and, as such, did not include a specific requirement to lift the Abrams M1A1 tank. Regardless, the Landing Platform Amphibious Watercraft can technically lift a load of greater weight than the Abrams tank. The Army has initiated a program to validate this through engineering studies and trials. This process will be completed by June 2007. The long-term plan to procure amphibious ships under JP2048 does include the specific requirement to lift Abrams tanks and that capability will be brought into service with the Canberra-class Landing Helicopter Dock ships.

**Terrorism****(Question No. 4828)**

**Mr McClelland** asked the Attorney-General, in writing, on 30 October 2006:

- (1) Which specific sections of the 13 international conventions on terrorist-related activities cover: (a) incitement to suicide terrorism as a crime of universal jurisdiction; (b) a comprehensive definition of the crime of terrorism; and (c) incitement to suicide terrorism by constitutionally responsible rulers, public officials or private officials.
- (2) Will he undertake to investigate further the potential benefits of a Convention on Suicide Terrorism to the global fight against terrorism, and report publicly on his findings.

**Mr Ruddock**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) (a) None of the 13 international conventions on terrorism specifically cover incitement to suicide terrorism as a crime of universal jurisdiction.

However, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights requires any advocacy of national, racial or religious hatred that constitutes discrimination, hostility or violence to be prohibited by law. Furthermore, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1624 (adopted on 14 September 2005) calls upon all States to adopt such measures as may be necessary and appropriate and in accordance with their obligations under international law to prohibit by law incitement to commit a terrorist act or acts; prevent such conduct; and deny safe haven to any persons with respect to whom there is credible and relevant information giving serious reasons for considering that they have been guilty of such conduct.

The United Nations is negotiating a Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism. The draft convention includes provisions that prohibit Parties from assisting in any way the commission of terrorist offences in other countries. This includes acquiescing in, encouraging or tolerating activities within their territories directed towards the commission of such offences. In terms of jurisdiction, the convention requires Parties to establish their jurisdiction over terrorist offences if they are committed by or against their nationals, or if they are committed in their territory.

- (b) A number of the international conventions on terrorist-related activities define terrorist acts. It is expected that once the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism is finalised, it will similarly define such acts.
  - (c) As per response to (1) (a).
- (2) The Australian Government condemns all forms of terrorism and is committed to fighting terrorism both in Australia and internationally. We have developed comprehensive offences that capture a broad range of activities involved in the commission of a terrorist attack. At the international level, multiple conventions already exist that target terrorism as a whole. These conventions already capture suicide terrorism since, by definition, suicide terrorism is a subset of terrorism in general. Given this strong existing legal framework, the Government does not see a need to develop a particular international convention on suicide terrorism.

**Foreign Fishing Vessels****(Question No. 4836)**

**Mr Price** asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 30 October 2006:

Further to his response to question No. 3984 (*Hansard*, 19 October 2006, page 121), for each of the past five years, how many small wooden boats have been detected and referred to the National Surveillance Centre by (a) radar that has been optimised to detect small wooden targets and (b) infra-red devices used to detect targets for the purposes of obtaining imagery.

**Dr Nelson**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The Border Protection Command does not collect statistics on which piece of equipment on board an aircraft or surface asset first detects a target vessel.

**Legislative Instruments****(Question No. 4838)**

**Mr Melham** asked the Attorney-General, in writing, on 30 October 2006:

- (1) What instruments have been signed by the Attorney-General or his predecessors under subsection 9(2) of the Crimes (Foreign Incursions and Recruitment) Act 1978.
- (2) When was each instrument signed.
- (3) Have any instruments signed under subsection 9(2) of the Act been revoked and if so, when.

**Mr Ruddock**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) I have signed no instrument under subsection 9(2) of the Crimes (Foreign Incursions and Recruitment) Act 1978 and I am advised by officers of my Department that, after conducting a search of the Gazette and Federal Register of Legislative Instruments, they are satisfied that no instruments have been made pursuant to subsection 9(2) of the Crimes (Foreign Incursions and Recruitment) Act.
- (2) Refer to (1) above.
- (3) Refer to (1) above.

**Iraq****(Question No. 4844)**

**Mr Kelvin Thomson** asked the Minister for Health and Ageing, in writing, on 31 October 2006:

- (1) Is he aware of a letter titled “The Iraq deaths study was valid and correct”, which was published in *The Age* on 22 October 2006 and which was written by 27 leading medical researchers in Australia in response to the article titled “Mortality after the 2003 invasion of Iraq: a cross-sectional cluster sample survey”, which appeared in *The Lancet*, October 2006; if so, is the letter correct in its assertion that the *Lancet* study’s methodology is sound and that its conclusions should be taken seriously.
- (2) Are the authors of the letter referred to in Part (1) respected members of the Australia’s medical science research community; if so, should their considered opinion on subjects within their fields of professional expertise be seriously considered.
- (3) Do the authors of the letter referred to in Part (1) represent Australia’s best understanding of medical science research methodology, as it relates to collection of health data.
- (4) Do the authors of the letter referred to in Part (1) receive public funding for their research activities.
- (5) Have any of the authors referred to in Part (1) received Commonwealth recognition for their work.
- (6) Does the Department of Health have any guidelines or accepted practices relating to methodologies for the collection of health data; if so, are they consistent with the methodology used in *The Lancet*’s study referred to in Part (1).
- (7) Is he aware of any reasons to dismiss the findings of the *Lancet* article; if so, (a) what are the reasons and (b) to what extent would any such reasons modify the conclusions of *The Lancet*’s study.

**Mr Abbott**—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

The subject matter of this article falls outside the scope of the Minister for Health and Ageing’s portfolio responsibilities. Any interest in the background of the authors should be followed up by the member concerned.

**Fiji****(Question No. 4853)**

**Mr Sercombe** asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 1 November 2006:

- (1) Is he aware of media reports speculating on the possibility of a coup in Fiji.
- (2) Can he advise whether any representations have been made in relation to this matter to Fiji’s Defence Force by the Australian Defence Force; if so, (a) what was the nature of those representations and (b) did they address any implications for Australian’s relations with Fiji—particularly in respect of the Defence Cooperation Program.

**Dr Nelson**—The answer to the honourable member’s question is as follows:

- (1) Yes.
- (2) Yes.
  - (a) The Chief of the Defence Force and other senior officers of the Australian Defence Force have conveyed messages to the Commander and senior officers of the Republic of Fiji Military Force (RFMF) on the Australian Government’s support for the democratically elected Government of Fiji. They have stressed the proper role of the military in a democracy.
  - (b) These discussions were held in confidence between the two parties. However, it has nevertheless been made clear to the RFMF leadership that the Australian Government would view any action counter to the rule of the elected Government of Fiji as a grave and serious matter.

**Child Care****(Question Nos 4872 and 4875)**

**Ms Plibersek** asked the Minister for Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, in writing, on 27 November 2006:

- (1) According to the most recent quarterly figures on childcare usage as verified by Centrelink, in any given week, what is the number of families receiving Child Care Benefit (CCB) for approved care and what is the breakdown of that figure in respect of: (a) the number of children in care from each family; (b) whether the children are in (i) family day care or long day care, or (ii) outside school hours care; and (c) the number of hours for which CCB was paid for each child.
- (2) According to the most recent quarterly figures on childcare usage as verified by Centrelink, what is the average family income, or CCB rate, for families with (a) one child in approved care, (b) two children in approved care and (c) three children in approved care.
- (3) According to the most recent quarterly figures on childcare usage as verified by Centrelink, what proportion of families with a child in long day care or family day care receive CCB for (a) one day each week, (b) two days each week, (c) three days each week, (d) four days each week and (e) five days each week.



- (4) According to the most recent quarterly figures on childcare usage as verified by Centrelink, how many families received the (a) maximum, (b) minimum and (c) average rate of CCB for approved care in the most recent quarter for which figures are available, shown as (i) raw numbers and (ii) as a proportion of the total population of approved care users who receive CCB.
- (5) According to the most recent quarterly figures on childcare usage, as verified by Centrelink, what is the median rate of CCB paid for approved care.
- (6) According to the most recent quarterly figures on childcare usage as verified by Centrelink, what is the average number of hours of care for which CCB is paid each week for children in (a) long day care and (b) family day care.
- (7) For the financial year 2005-06, (a) how many families were paid CCB for registered care, (b) what was the average number of hours of registered care for which CCB was paid each week and (c) what was the average number of children in each family for whom CCB was paid for registered care.
- (8) For the financial year 2005-06 and for each State and Territory, what was the (a) average, (b) highest and (c) lowest fee for which CCB was paid for (i) family day care, (ii) long day care and (iii) outside school hours care.

**Mr Brough**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The number of families receiving Child Care Benefit and the proportion of families on maximum and minimum rate Child Care Benefit may be found in the published Annual Reports of the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs (formerly the Department of Family and Community Services).

Information on the number of days per week children receive Child Care Benefit for is not collected by the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs as it is not required for the purpose of administering Child Care Benefit.

Information on estimated family income and the average number of both used and paid hours of child care may be found in the published reports from the Australian Government Census of Child Care Services. When released, the Productivity Commission's 2007 Report on Government Services will also contain information on these topics.

The very detailed information requested is not collated by the Department of Families, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs in the normal course of program management. Due to the substantial resources required to produce this information it will not be provided.

### **Human Rights: Cambodia**

#### **(Question No. 4876)**

**Mr Danby** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, in writing, on 27 November 2006:

- (1) Has he seen comments by Mr Yash Ghai, the United Nations Secretary-General's Special Representative for Human Rights in Cambodia, that "human rights are being violated on a systemic scale by the Cambodian Government"?
- (2) Does he agree with Mr Ghai's statements that the Cambodian Government has undermined the independence of the judiciary and severely restricted freedom of speech and freedom of assembly, including for members of the Cambodian Parliament, and has condoned corruption on a large scale, including illegal land appropriations.
- (3) Does he agree with Mr Ghai that "the international community bears a special responsibility to support Cambodia and its people," particularly in view of Australia's status as a signatory to the 1991 agreement which brought democratic government to Cambodia.
- (4) What steps has he taken to protest to the Cambodian Government about these violations of Cambodia's constitution and of the 1991 peace settlement; specifically, did he raise these issues with Prime Minister Hun Sen during his recent visit to Australia; if not, why not; if so, what was Mr Hun Sen's response.

**Mr Downer**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) Yes.
- (2) Since 1993 the Government of Cambodia has worked to rebuild institutions and culture that support democracy in the wake of the devastation of the Pol Pot era and subsequent political and civil unrest. This is an ongoing, long-term task.
- (3) Yes.
- (4) Human rights issues are raised regularly with the Cambodian Government. I did not meet separately with Prime Minister Hun Sen during his recent visit.

### **Defence: Contracts**

#### **(Question No. 4880)**

**Mr McClelland** asked the Minister Assisting the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 27 November 2006:

In respect of Tender 7/2006, which was released on 18 July 2006 by the Royal Australian Navy (RAN) Training Authority Aviation for the lease of helicopters to address a retention and motivation concern for Navy trainee helicopter aircrew: (a) were Defence Industry participants given prior advice of this requirement and the potential for release of the tender; if not why not; (b) was a company that is currently contracted to provide technical and logistics support and advice to the RAN for the helicopter training capability able to participate in the tendering process. If so was there a conflict with that company's contractual obligation to provide advice on solutions to overcome problems confronting the delivery of the capability; (c) of the

four tender proposals submitted, was the company referred to in Part (b) the only one invited to showcase its solution on 25 September at Naval Air Station Nowra; (d) was the company selected to showcase essentially the same company that Navy originally sought to sole-source this requirement.

**Mr Billson**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(a) to (d) See responses to parts a, e, f, g and h to Question W7 from the 2006-07 Budget Supplementary Estimates hearing on 1 November 2006.

***Defence Direct***

**(Question No. 4884)**

**Mr McClelland** asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 27 November 2006:

Has he received feedback from serving personnel in respect of the Australian government magazine *Defence Direct*, if so, (a) has that feedback included criticism of the Government's current strategy in respect of Iraq and (b) after deletion of any identifiers, will the Government publish that feedback.

**Dr Nelson**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

Yes, I have received some very positive feedback on my electronic newsletter from serving personnel.

(a) No.

(b) Not applicable.

**Defence: Contracts**

**(Question No. 4888)**

**Mr McClelland** asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 27 November 2006:

- (1) Was the contract to operate the clothing Store at RAAF Base Williams taken up by Serco Sodexho on 25 September 2006; if so, why was the new contract let when the existing contract with Transfield Services, sub-contracted to Spotless Services, had more than a month to run.
- (2) Was the five year contract with Transfield Services, sub-contracted to Spotless Services, extended for one year and then for a further year, to 31 October 2006.
- (3) Is he aware of claims made by several contractor employees that they have been financially disadvantaged by the early re-letting of the RAAF Base Williams clothing store contract, in particular because it left employees some five weeks short of qualifying for pro-rata long service leave.
- (4) Does the Government intend to restore the benefits to which the Spotless Services employees would have been entitled if the original contract, and their employment, had continued until 31 October 2006.
- (5) Was the Department of Defence (Garrison Support Contract for Southern Victoria, Clothing Stores) funded to include the payment of contractor employee entitlements, including long-service pro-rata payments after a minimum seven years' service; if so, how will the unspent funds initially allocated for this purpose be disbursed.

**Dr Nelson**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) Yes. The existing contract with Transfield Services, sub-contracted to Spotless Services, was due to expire on 30 September 2006.
- (2) The contract with Transfield Services, sub-contracted to Spotless Services, was for the period 1 March 2004 to 30 September 2006.
- (3) No.
- (4) The original contract to which the Spotless Services employees were employed was due for termination on 30 September 2006.
- (5) No.

**Taxation**

**(Question No. 4890)**

**Mr Fitzgibbon** asked the Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer, in writing, on 27 November 2006:

- (1) How many cases did the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) refer to the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions (DPP) in the 2005-06 financial year.
- (2) How many large businesses did the ATO refer to the Commonwealth DPP for prosecution in the 2005-06 financial year.

**Mr Dutton**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) 437.

(2) 1.

**Wine Equalisation Tax**  
**(Question No. 4897)**

**Mr Fitzgibbon** asked the Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer, in writing, on 27 November 2006:

In respect of information given in the Australian Tax Office Annual Report 2005-06 (page 134), that while there were no criminal prosecutions or administrative sanctions imposed under the Wine Equalisation Tax, eight breaches resulted in the imposition of penalties totalling \$75,099, (a) what was the nature of each breach and (b) by whom was each committed.

**Mr Dutton**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (a) There was a range of issues involved in the eight breaches;
- 3 involved the maximum producer rebate limit being exceeded;
  - 2 involved clients who were unable to substantiate their claims;
  - 1 involved the non-lodgment of a Business Activity Statement;
  - 1 involved an over claiming of the WET credit due to incorrect calculation method; and
  - 1 involved both WET credits and liabilities being incorrectly reported resulting in a net liability.
- (b) It has long been the practice of the Commissioner not to provide information relating to specific taxpayers.

**Tobacco Industry**  
**(Question No. 4898)**

**Mr Fitzgibbon** asked the Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer, in writing, on 27 November 2006:

- (1) Can the Australian Taxation Office (ATO) estimate how much tobacco is being diverted into the illegal market; if not, why not.
- (2) In respect of concerns raised in the Australian National Audit Office Report 33, 2005-06, Administration of Petroleum and Tobacco Excise Collections: Follow-up Audit, that it is difficult to evaluate the effectiveness of the ATO's compliance program without knowing how much tobacco is entering the illegal market, how does the ATO intend to rectify this problem.
- (3) How many tobacco growers are involved in the black market.

**Mr Dutton**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) and (2) As the questions asked are very similar to those questions asked by Senator Sherry, at the Senate Economics Estimates hearing on 30 May 2006, I refer to the Commissioner of Taxation's response to question on notice BET 130.
- (3) Illegal tobacco can be sourced through legally grown crops, smuggled imported leaf or from illegal production.

There has recently been a major change in the tobacco industry in Australia. The major manufacturers have announced they will no longer be purchasing tobacco grown by growers in Victoria and South Queensland. As such a legal market for locally grown tobacco leaf no longer exists in Australia. This change is expected to significantly alter the profile of illicit tobacco activity into the future.

As a result of the decision to cease purchasing Australian produced tobacco the Tax Office has commenced a process to cancel the licences of all current tobacco producers.

**Taxation: Tractors and Harvesters**  
**(Question No. 4899)**

**Mr Fitzgibbon** asked the Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer, in writing, on 27 November 2006:

In respect of the changes announced in his media release of 16 November 2006, what will be the cost of these changes for each forward estimates year.

**Mr Dutton**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The statutory cap on the effective life for tractors and harvesters announced on 16 November 2006 does not have any impact on the forward estimates of revenue.

**Future Fund**  
**(Question No. 4902)**

**Mr Fitzgibbon** asked the Treasurer, in writing, on 27 November 2006:

Has Treasury done a model of the tax expenditure of tax free status of the Future Fund in the 2006 tax expenditure statement, if so, will he provide that model.

**Mr Costello**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

No. The tax free status of the Future Fund does not give rise to a tax expenditure because the Future Fund is a government body.

**Higher Education**  
**(Question No. 4909)**

**Ms Macklin** asked the Minister for Education, Science and Training, in writing, on 27 November 2006:

Is she conducting a review of the (a) relative funding model or (b) the funding cluster arrangements used in the Higher Education Support Act 2003. If so, (a) what is the scope of the review, (b) when did the review commence, (c) when is the review due to be completed, (d) will the findings or report arising from the review be made public, (e) who is conducting the review and (f) have external consultants been engaged to conduct, or provide opinion or assistance to the review; if so, (i) who are the consultants and (ii) what is the total value of the contract.

**Ms Julie Bishop**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

I refer the honourable member to my press release of 19 December 2006, 'Review of University reforms', announcing the commencement of the review of the impact of reforms on the higher education sector enacted through the Higher Education Support Act 2003.

**Uhrig Report**  
**(Question No. 4911)**

**Mr Martin Ferguson** asked the Minister for Small Business and Tourism, in writing, on 27 November 2006:

Has she, or her department, been provided with a Statement of Expectations as part of the outcomes of the review of Tourism Australia against the governance principles and templates established in the Review of the Corporate Governance of Statutory Authorities and Office Holders (the Uhrig Report); if so, (a) when will the Statement of Expectations be released to the public, (b) what are the contents of the Statement of Expectations and (c) will implementation of the Statement of Expectation require any legislative amendments; if so, is there a timeline for the introduction of any legislative amendments necessary to implement the Statement of Expectations.

**Fran Bailey**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

(1) Yes.

- (a) I will make a decision on this when I have completed considering the corresponding Statement of Intent from Tourism Australia.
- (b) See the answer to (a).
- (c) I do not anticipate any legislative amendments will be required by the Statement of Expectations. However, I am proposing legislation to amend the Tourism Australia Act 2004 so as to implement the findings of my assessment of the governance of Tourism Australia according to the Review of the Corporate Governance of Statutory Authorities and Office Holders (the Uhrig Review). I currently expect that this legislation will be introduced in 2007.

**Mr Scott Morrison**  
**(Question No. 4912)**

**Mr Martin Ferguson** asked the Minister for Small Business and Tourism, in writing, on 27 November 2006:

Further to her response to question No. 3857 (*Hansard*, 30 October 2006, page 127), (a) did her office request closer scrutiny of and/or input into all, or any, media statements issued by Tourism Australia in the four months preceding, and the months following, the departure of Managing Director, Mr Scott Morrison and (b) did the procedures following the release of all media statements from Tourism Australia during 2006 differ from the processes established and adhered to in 2004 and 2005.

**Fran Bailey**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (a) I reiterate my previous answer that Tourism Australia is aware that, in accordance with sections 16 (1) (a) and (b) of the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997, my office should be informed of the details of all proposed media releases.
- (b) There were no changes to procedures during 2006.

**Canterbury Multicultural Aged and Disability Support Services**  
**(Question No. 4920)**

**Mr Laurie Ferguson** asked the Minister representing the Minister for Ageing, in writing, on 28 November 2006:

- (1) What action did the Department of Health and Ageing (DHA) take following allegations reported to it in August 2005, of serious malpractice occurring at Canterbury Multicultural Aged and Disability Support Services Inc (CMADSS).
- (2) Following the release of the Walter Turnbull auditor's report, does the DHA have a proposed course of action in relation to CMADSS.
- (3) Given the nature of the allegations and the facts revealed in the Walter Turnbull auditor's report, has the DHA considered withdrawing funding for the group.
- (4) Is the DHA aware of the substantial cash reserves (\$800,000) held by CMADSS.
- (5) Could the accumulation referred to in Part (4) represent a deficit in the quality of service delivery to CMADSS clients.

- (6) Does the DHA intend to monitor the level of service provided in future by CMADSS.
- (7) Has the DHA become aware of allegations relating to CMADSS expenditure of \$1,121,166 over the past four years.
- (8) Can he explain the alleged expenditure by CMADSS over four years of: (a) \$260,000 of public funds on professional fees; (b) \$251,586 for rent of a property that is fully owned by the organisation and was paid for out of public funds; and (c) \$608,694 of public funds on internal management fees.

**Mr Abbott**—The Minister for Ageing has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

- (1) The Department of Health and Ageing (the Department) reviewed allegations about CMADSS reported to it in August 2005, regarding corporate governance issues and use of Australian Government funds, and found that there was no specific information indicating misuse of Australian Government funds. As a number of the allegations related to the organisation's operation as an incorporated association, these were referred to the NSW State Government for its consideration.

The Department has reviewed CMADSS' annual audited financial statements and monthly statements of direct hours of service provided by CMADSS through its Community Aged Care Package service, and six monthly activity reports of its National Respite for Carers Program service.

As part of the Australian Government's Quality Reporting Program, CMADSS was reviewed in December 2005. This involved CMADSS submitting a written report and the Department undertaking a desk audit. The Department subsequently visited CMADSS on 7-8 March 2006. CMADSS were informed of the Department's concerns about the systems and processes in place and an improvement plan was developed to address these concerns. Another site visit occurred on 15 June 2006.

The Department maintains ongoing discussions with CMADSS with regard to its governance, its responsibilities as an approved provider of community care under the Aged Care Act 1997, and its contractual responsibilities as a provider of a National Respite for Carers Program service.

- (2) The Department continues to monitor the operations of CMADSS on an ongoing basis with respect to its responsibilities as an approved provider of community care under the Aged Care Act 1997, and its contractual responsibilities as a provider of a National Respite for Carers Program service. This includes the standard monitoring of the organisation's Community Aged Care Package audited annual financial statements, and its six-monthly National Respite for Carers Program financial accountability reports.
- (3) The Department assesses the operations of CMADSS on an ongoing basis with respect to its responsibilities as an approved provider of community care under the Aged Care Act 1997, and its contractual responsibilities as a provider of a National Respite for Carers Program service.
- (4) Yes. Management of organisational funds is the responsibility of an aged care provider. Such providers are accountable to the Department for expenditure in accordance with contractual and legal requirements. A provider must spend Australian Government funds for the purposes for which they are provided, and may expend those funds in the way it believes will best meet this objective, within those contractual and legal requirements.
- (5) No. The Department has no evidence that the quality of direct care provided by CMADSS to care recipients of Australian Government funded aged care services is deficient.
- (6) The Department continues to monitor monthly statements of direct hours of service provided by CMADSS through its Community Aged Care Package service, and six monthly activity reports of its National Respite for Carers Program service.
- (7) Yes. As stated in response to question 1, the Department reviewed allegations about CMADSS reported to it in August 2005, regarding corporate governance issues and use of Australian Government funds, and found that there was no specific information indicating misuse of Australian Government funds. As a number of the allegations related to the organisation's operation as an incorporated association, these were referred to the NSW State Government for its consideration.
- (8) (a), (b) and (c) As stated in response to question 4, management of organisational funds is the responsibility of an aged care provider, who is then accountable to the Department for expenditure in accordance with contractual and legal requirements. A provider must spend Australian Government funds for the purposes for which they are provided, and may expend those funds in the way it believes will best meet this objective, within those contractual and legal requirements.

### **Defence: Contracts**

#### **(Question No. 4921)**

**Mr Fitzgibbon** asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 28 November 2006:

Is the publicly listed company known as Allied (ASX: Code RTZ), or any of its subsidiaries, a contractor to his department; if so, how many contracts did Allied successfully secure in (a) 2001-02, (b) 2002-03, (c) 2003-04, (d) 2004-05 and (e) 2005-06.

**Dr Nelson**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

There is no company with ASX: Code RTZ listed on the Australian Stock Exchange. The full name of the listed company Allied (ASX: Code ATZ) is Allied Technologies Group Pty Ltd (ATG), which is used in the below response.

ATG has two subsidiary companies: Allied Group Pty Ltd (AGPL) and ServicePoint. AGPL has not been awarded any contracts by Defence during the years requested.

	2001-02	2002-03	2003-04	2004-05	2005-06
ATG	207	161	98	116	33
ServicePoint	37	47	48	28	31

### Taxation

#### (Question No. 4922)

**Mr Fitzgibbon** asked the Minister for Revenue and Assistant Treasurer, in writing, on 28 November 2006:

For the financial year (a) 2004-2005 and (b) 2005-2006, how many trusts (i) adopted the Simplified Tax System and (ii) claimed the entrepreneurial tax offset.

**Mr Dutton**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (a) (i) 54,361 (this figure also includes trusts which have elected to use STS since 2002).
- (ii) The Entrepreneur's Tax Offset is only applicable from the financial year 2005-06.
- (b) (i) 59,887 as at 4 December 2006 (the 2005-06 return lodgment program extends until May 2007).
- (ii) A trust cannot claim the Entrepreneurs' Tax Offset. However, the trustees and the beneficiaries of a trust can claim the offset if the trust turnover and income fall within the Entrepreneurs' Tax Offset eligibility tests. In the financial year 2005-06, 2,427 trustees and/or beneficiaries of 1,344 eligible trusts have claimed the offset in returns processed up to 4 December 2006.

### Major Michael Mori

#### (Question No. 4923)

**Mr Murphy** asked the Attorney-General, in writing, on 28 November 2006:

Further to his response to Part (3) of question No. 4108 (*Hansard*, 2 November 2006, page 116), which stated that Major Mori did not ask to meet with the Attorney-General; did Major Mori's representatives, or any organisation acting on his behalf, seek to establish a meeting between Major Mori and the Attorney-General during his visit to Australia in August; if so, what are the full reasons that the Attorney-General did not meet with Major Mori.

**Mr Ruddock**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

No.

### Mr David Hicks

#### (Question No. 4924)

**Mr Murphy** asked the Attorney-General, in writing, on 28 November 2006:

- (1) Did he see the report titled "Hicks may be home by Christmas", which appeared in the *Sydney Morning Herald* on 15 August 2006; if not, why not.
- (2) In respect of that part of the report which stated that the Attorney-General "indicated that the Australian Government wanted a new US military tribunal, and fresh charges, to be in place by November": considering that this timeframe is now unachievable, can he give an amended estimate of when Mr David Hicks' case will be heard; if not, why not.
- (3) Can he confirm that part of the report which stated that the Attorney-General would want a new US military tribunal and fresh charges in place "as quickly as possible" and "were that not to be the case we would be seeking his [Mr Hicks'] return in the same way we did with Mamdouh Habib"; if not, why not.
- (4) What are the full details of all action taken by the Government, since the US mid-term elections, to seek Mr Hicks' return to Australia.

**Mr Ruddock**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) Yes.
- (2) The US Congress passed the Military Commissions Act on 29 September 2006, ahead of the US Congressional mid-term elections, which took place in November. There is no set date for Mr Hicks' trial at this stage. Mr Hicks has not yet been formally charged under the new Military Commissions Act. President Bush has stated that he hopes Mr Hicks "is one of the early people that will have a day in court".
- (3) Yes.
- (4) The Government has not sought Mr Hicks' return to Australia.

### *Poul Spirit (ELSG5)*

#### (Question No. 4926)

**Mr Fitzgibbon** asked the Treasurer, in writing, on 29 November 2006:

In respect of the Aframax double-hulled ship *Poul Spirit (ELSG5)*, registered in Liberia and travelling under a Bahamian flag, which, having last ported at Umm Qasr, berthed at the BP Oil refinery Jetty (BP Refinery ORJ3) in Fremantle on 21 October

2000, discharged a cargo of 90,381,000 litres of crude petroleum consigned by BP Australia and departed from that port on 25 October 2000 for Woodside's Cossack Pioneer site:

- (a) was customs duty paid on the shipment; if so, what sum was paid;
- (b) was GST paid on the shipment; if so, what sum was paid;
- (c) at what stage in the oil importation and refining process is GST usually paid; and
- (d) were there any irregularities in respect of the processing of this shipment, including
  - (i) processing delays,
  - (ii) requests for special or additional work or clearance requirements,
  - (iii) missing or incomplete documentation or
  - (iv) any other irregularity.

**Mr Costello**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

It has long been the practice of the Commissioner not to provide information about the affairs of individual taxpayers.

By way of general comment it is advised that when goods are entered for home consumption in Australia, GST is collected by Customs. It is either paid at that point or an entry is recorded on the deferred GST system for reconciliation on the next BAS.

### **Foreign Diplomatic and Consular Personnel**

#### **(Question No. 4930)**

**Mr Melham** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, in writing, on 29 November 2006:

- (1) Since March 1996, have any foreign diplomatic or consular personnel posted to Australia been asked or required to leave owing to allegations of activities incompatible with their diplomatic or consular status.
- (2) In each case: (a) what was the embassy or consulate involved; (b) what was the name and position of the person concerned; (c) when did their diplomatic or consular posting in Australia begin and end; and (d) what was the nature of the alleged activity or action in question.

**Mr Downer**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) Yes
- (2) For privacy reasons, it is not appropriate to provide any additional detail concerning individual cases.

### **Human Rights: Israel**

#### **(Question No. 4935)**

**Mr Danby** asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs, in writing, on 30 November 2006:

- (1) Is he aware of the article published in *Haaretz* on 22 November 2006, which stated that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, Louise Arbour, refused to meet with the families of three Israeli soldiers captured by Hezbollah in July 2006; if so, can he confirm that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights refused to meet with the soldiers' families and if so, (a) what is the Government's response to the High Commissioner's refusal and (b) what are the implications of the High Commissioner's decision.
- (2) What is the Government's policy in respect of the abduction of enemy soldiers in the course of military conflict.
- (3) What are the responsibilities of government bodies and international organisations, such as the United Nations, in respect of responding to such abduction incidents.

**Mr Downer**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) Yes, I am aware of the 22 November 2006 article in *Haaretz*. My understanding is that the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights in fact met with the families of the captured soldiers during her visit to Israel, as announced during her 23 November 2006 press conference in Jerusalem.
- (2) All parties to a conflict have responsibilities to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law.  
On the specific issue raised in (1), Australia utterly condemns taking hostages for political purposes and calls for the immediate and unconditional release of the IDF soldiers, including Cpl Gilad Shalit, taken hostage near the Israel-Gaza border on 25 June, and also the two IDF soldiers taken hostage on 12 July by Hezbollah. The abduction of IDF soldiers will do nothing to advance the cause of the Palestinian people. We are deeply concerned at the complicity of Hamas' armed wing in the initial attack and at the subsequent action by Hezbollah on the Israel Lebanon Border.
- (3) All states have a responsibility to abide by their obligations under international humanitarian law in response to any conflict. Specific provisions of the Geneva Conventions and their Additional Protocols set out the relationship between states and international organisations including the United Nations.

### **Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation**

#### **(Question No. 4942)**

**Mr Murphy** asked the Minister for Education, Science and Training, in writing, on 30 November 2006:

Further to her response to Part (6) of question No. 4344, notwithstanding that the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) is responsible for determining its own policies in relation to matters such as public comment, will she investigate whether members of her staff have spoken to managers at the CSIRO regarding what scientists can, cannot, should or should not say in the course of their duties; if so, when; if not, why not.

**Ms Julie Bishop**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

No. As I have previously noted, CSIRO is an independent statutory body and is responsible for determining its own policies in relation to matters such as public comment.

#### **Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation**

##### **(Question No. 4943)**

**Mr Murphy** asked the Minister for Education, Science and Training, in writing, on 30 November 2006:

Further to her response to Part (7) of question No. 4344, notwithstanding that the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO) is responsible for determining its own policies in relation to matters such as public comment, will she investigate whether officers from the Department of Education, Science and Training have spoken to managers at the CSIRO regarding what scientists can, cannot, should or should not say in the course of their duties; if so, when; if not, why not.

**Ms Julie Bishop**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

No. As I have previously noted, CSIRO is an independent statutory body and is responsible for determining its own policies in relation to matters such as public comment.

#### **Joint Strike Fighter**

##### **(Question No. 4946)**

**Mr McClelland** asked the Minister for Defence, in writing, on 4 December 2006:

- (1) Can the Government confirm the statement by Mr Jon Schrieber, director of international programs in the Joint Strike Fighter (JSF) program office, that "at this point there is no non-depleted-uranium (non-DU) round available" for the JSF's 25 mm Gatling gun.
- (2) Can the Government confirm that Australian Defence Industries and Oerlikon are contenders in the partner-only selection process for development of a conventional round.
- (3) Can the Government confirm that the United States will require JSF partners who wish to pursue the non-DU round to pay the US\$30 million cost of qualifying it for service.
- (4) Is the Government opposed to acquiring DU rounds for use in an Australian JSF variant.
- (5) Will the Government proceed with the JSF project if it is unable to secure a non-DU alternative for the 25 mm Gatling gun.

**Dr Nelson**—The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

- (1) Yes.
- (2) There is currently no formal selection process for a conventional round for the JSF's gun. Industry within a number of JSF partner countries, including Australia, is developing a conventional round suitable for the JSF's gun.
- (3) Any prospective qualifying costs for a non-DU round for the JSF have not been determined. However, it is likely that any costs associated with qualifying a non-DU round would be shared among JSF partners benefiting from the use of a non-DU round.
- (4) Yes.
- (5) Development and certification of a non-DU round suitable for the JSF is considered to be a relatively low risk activity and is highly unlikely to affect the Government's JSF acquisition decision.