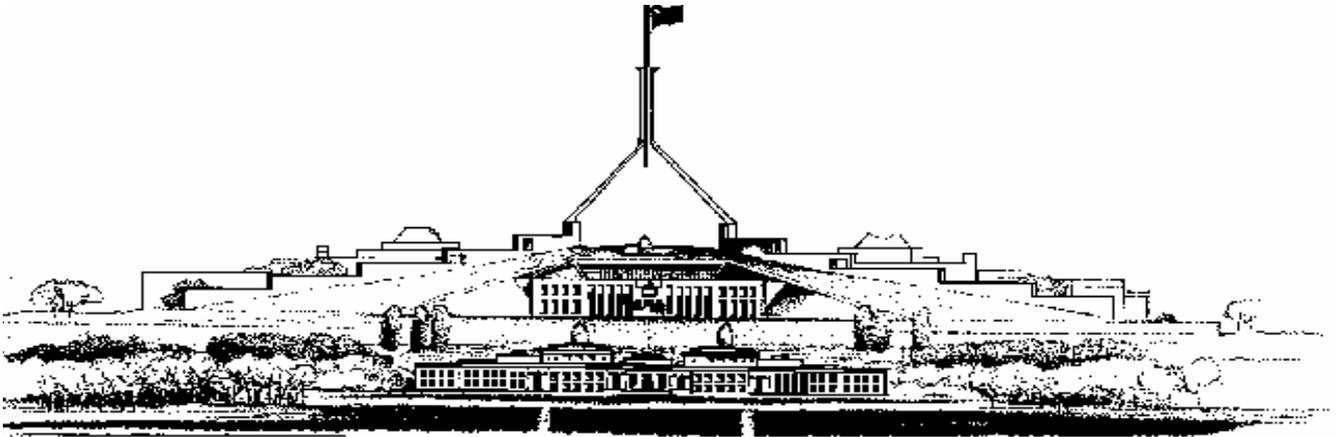




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

**PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES**



# House of Representatives

## Official Hansard

**No. 3, 2010**

**Tuesday, 26 October 2010**

FORTY-THIRD PARLIAMENT  
FIRST SESSION—FIRST PERIOD

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES



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### **SITTING DAYS—2010**

Month	Date
February	2, 3, 4, 8, 9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24, 25
March	9, 10, 11, 15, 16, 17, 18
May	11, 12, 13, 24, 25, 26, 27, 31
June	1, 2, 3, 15, 16, 17, 21, 22, 23, 24
September	28, 29, 30
October	18, 19, 20, 21, 25, 26, 27, 28
November	15, 16, 17, 18, 22, 23, 24, 25

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

**Governor-General**

Her Excellency Ms Quentin Bryce, Companion of the Order of Australia

**House of Representatives Officeholders**

*Speaker*—Mr Harry Alfred Jenkins MP

*Deputy Speaker*—Hon. Peter Neil Slipper MP

*Second Deputy Speaker*—Hon. Bruce Craig Scott MP

*Members of the Speaker's Panel*—Ms Anna Elizabeth Burke, MP Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry Adams MP, Ms Sharon Leah Bird MP, Mrs Yvette Maree D'Ath MP, Mr Steven Georganas MP, Kirsten Fiona Livermore MP, Mr John Paul Murphy MP, Mr Peter Sid Sidebottom MP, Mr Kelvin John Thomson MP, Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP

*Leader of the House*—Hon. Anthony Norman Albanese MP

*Deputy Leader of the House*—Hon. Stephen Francis Smith MP

*Manager of Opposition Business*—Hon. Christopher Maurice Pyne MP

*Deputy Manager of Opposition Business*—Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP

**Party Leaders and Whips**

Australian Labor Party

*Leader*—Hon. Julia Eileen Gillard MP

*Deputy Leader*—Hon. Wayne Maxwell Swan MP

*Chief Government Whip*—Hon. Joel Andrew Fitzgibbon MP

*Government Whips*—Ms Jill Griffiths Hall MP and Mr Christopher Patrick Hayes MP

Liberal Party of Australia

*Leader*—Hon. Anthony John Abbott MP

*Deputy Leader*—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP

*Chief Opposition Whip*—Hon. Warren George Entsch MP

*Opposition Whips*—Mr Patrick Damien Secker MP and Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

The Nationals

*Leader*—Hon. Warren Errol Truss MP

*Chief Whip*—Mr Mark Maclean Coulton MP

*Whip*—Mr Paul Christopher Neville MP

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### Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
Abbott, Hon. Anthony John	Warringah, NSW	LP
Adams, Hon. Dick Godfrey Harry	Lyons, TAS	ALP
Albanese, Hon. Anthony Norman	Grayndler, NSW	ALP
Alexander, John Gilbert	Bennelong, NSW	LP
Andrews, Hon. Kevin James	Menzies, VIC	LP
Andrews, Karen Lesley	McPherson, QLD	LP
Baldwin, Hon. Robert Charles	Paterson, NSW	LP
Bandt, Adam Paul	Melbourne, VIC	AG
Billson, Hon. Bruce Fredrick	Dunkley, VIC	LP
Bird, Sharon Leah	Cunningham, NSW	ALP
Bishop, Hon. Bronwyn Kathleen	Mackellar, NSW	LP
Bishop, Hon. Julie Isabel	Curtin, WA	LP
Bowen, Hon. Christopher Eyles	McMahon, NSW	ALP
Bradbury, Hon. David John	Lindsay, NSW	ALP
Briggs, Jamie Edward	Mayo, SA	LP
Broadbent, Russell Evan	McMillan, VIC	LP
Brodthmann, Gai Marie	Canberra, ACT	ALP
Buchholz, Scott Andrew	Wright, QLD	LP
Burke, Anna Elizabeth	Chisholm, VIC	ALP
Burke, Hon. Anthony Stephen	Watson, NSW	ALP
Butler, Hon. Mark Christopher	Port Adelaide, SA	ALP
Byrne, Hon. Anthony Michael	Holt, VIC	ALP
Champion, Nicholas David	Wakefield, SA	ALP
Cheeseman, Darren Leicester	Corangamite, VIC	ALP
Chester, Darren	Gippsland, VIC	Nats
Christensen, George Robert	Dawson, QLD	Nats
Ciobo, Steven Michele	Moncrieff, QLD	LP
Clare, Hon. Jason Dean	Blaxland, NSW	ALP
Cobb, Hon. John Kenneth	Calare, NSW	Nats
Collins, Hon. Julie Maree	Franklin, TAS	ALP
Combet, Hon. Greg Ivan, AM	Charlton, NSW	ALP
Coulton, Mark Maclean	Parkes, NSW	Nats
Crean, Hon. Simon Findlay	Hotham, VIC	ALP
Crook, Anthony John	O'Connor, WA	NWA
Danby, Michael David	Melbourne Ports, VIC	ALP
D'Ath, Yvette Maree	Petrie, QLD	ALP
Dreyfus, Hon. Mark Alfred, QC	Isaacs, VIC	ALP
Dutton, Hon. Peter Craig	Dickson, QLD	LP
Elliot, Hon. Maria Justine	Richmond, NSW	ALP
Ellis, Hon. Katherine Margaret	Adelaide, SA	ALP
Emerson, Hon. Craig Anthony	Rankin, QLD	ALP
Entsch, Warren George	Leichhardt, QLD	LP
Ferguson, Hon. Laurie Donald Thomas	Werriwa, NSW	ALP
Ferguson, Hon. Martin John, AM	Batman, VIC	ALP
Fitzgibbon, Hon. Joel Andrew	Hunter, NSW	ALP
Fletcher, Paul William	Bradfield, NSW	LP
Forrest, John Alexander	Mallee, VIC	Nats
Frydenberg, Joshua Anthony	Kooyong, VIC	LP

### Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
Gambaro, Hon. Teresa	Brisbane, QLD	LP
Garrett, Hon. Peter Robert, AM	Kingsford Smith, NSW	ALP
Gash, Joanna	Gilmore, NSW	LP
Georganas, Steve	Hindmarsh, SA	ALP
Gibbons, Stephen William	Bendigo, VIC	ALP
Gillard, Hon. Julia Eileen	Lalor, VIC	ALP
Gray, Hon. Gary, AO	Brand, WA	ALP
Grierson, Sharon Joy	Newcastle, NSW	ALP
Griffin, Hon. Alan Peter	Bruce, VIC	ALP
Griggs, Natasha Louise	Solomon, NT	CLP
Haase, Barry Wayne	Durack, WA	LP
Hall, Jill	Shortland, NSW	ALP
Hartsuyker, Luke	Cowper, NSW	Nats
Hawke, Alexander George	Mitchell, NSW	LP
Hayes, Christopher Patrick	Fowler, NSW	ALP
Hockey, Hon. Joseph Benedict	North Sydney, NSW	LP
Hunt, Hon. Gregory Andrew	Flinders, VIC	LP
Husic, Edham Nurredin	Chifley, NSW	ALP
Irons, Stephen James	Swan, WA	LP
Jenkins, Harry Alfred	Scullin, VIC	ALP
Jensen, Dennis Geoffrey	Tangney, WA	LP
Jones, Stephen Patrick	Throsby, NSW	ALP
Jones, Ewen Thomas	Herbert, QLD	LP
Katter, Hon. Robert Carl	Kennedy, QLD	Ind
Keenan, Michael Fayat	Stirling, WA	LP
Kelly, Hon. Michael Joseph, AM	Eden-Monaro, NSW	ALP
Kelly, Craig	Hughes, NSW	LP
King, Hon. Catherine Fiona	Ballarat, VIC	ALP
Laming, Andrew Charles	Bowman, QLD	LP
Leigh, Andrew Keith	Fraser, ACT	ALP
Ley, Hon. Sussan Penelope	Farrer, NSW	LP
Livermore, Kirsten Fiona	Capricornia, QLD	ALP
Lyons, Geoffrey Raymond	Bass, TAS	ALP
McClelland, Hon. Robert Bruce	Barton, NSW	ALP
Macfarlane, Hon. Ian Elgin	Groom, QLD	LP
Macklin, Hon. Jennifer Louise	Jagajaga, VIC	ALP
Marino, Nola Bethwyn	Forrest, WA	LP
Markus, Louise Elizabeth	Macquarie, NSW	LP
Marles, Hon. Richard Donald	Corio, VIC	ALP
Matheson, Russell Glenn	Macarthur, NSW	LP
McCormack, Michael	Riverina, NSW	Nats
Melham, Daryl	Banks, NSW	ALP
Mirabella, Sophie	Indi, VIC	LP
Mitchell, Robert George	McEwen, VIC	ALP
Morrison, Scott John	Cook, NSW	LP
Moylan, Hon. Judith Eleanor	Pearce, WA	LP
Murphy, Hon. John Paul	Reid, NSW	ALP
Neumann, Shayne Kenneth	Blair, QLD	ALP
Neville, Paul Christopher	Hinkler, QLD	Nats

### Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
Oakeshott, Robert James Murray	Lyne, NSW	Ind
O'Connor, Hon. Brendan Patrick	Gorton, VIC	ALP
O'Dowd, Kenneth Desmond	Flynn, QLD	Nats
O'Dwyer, Kelly Megan	Higgins, VIC	LP
O'Neill, Deborah Mary	Robertson, NSW	ALP
Owens, Julie Ann	Parramatta, NSW	ALP
Parke, Melissa	Fremantle, WA	ALP
Perrett, Graham Douglas	Moreton, QLD	ALP
Plibersek, Hon. Tanya Joan	Sydney, NSW	ALP
Prentice, Jane	Ryan, QLD	LP
Pyne, Hon. Christopher Maurice	Sturt, SA	LP
Ramsey, Rowan Eric	Grey, SA	LP
Randall, Don James	Canning, WA	LP
Ripoll, Bernard Fernand	Oxley, QLD	ALP
Rishworth, Amanda Louise	Kingston, SA	ALP
Robb, Hon. Andrew John, AO	Goldstein, VIC	LP
Robert, Stuart Rowland	Fadden, QLD	LP
Rowland, Michelle	Greenway, NSW	ALP
Roxon, Hon. Nicola Louise	Gellibrand, VIC	ALP
Roy, Wyatt Beau	Longman, QLD	LP
Rudd, Hon. Kevin Michael	Griffith, QLD	ALP
Ruddock, Hon. Philip Maxwell	Berowra, NSW	LP
Saffin, Janelle Anne	Page, NSW	ALP
Schultz, Albert John	Hume, NSW	LP
Scott, Hon. Bruce Craig	Maranoa, QLD	Nats
Secker, Patrick Damien	Barker, SA	LP
Shorten, Hon. William Richard	Maribyrnong, VIC	ALP
Sidebottom, Peter Sid	Braddon, TAS	ALP
Simpkins, Luke Xavier Linton	Cowan, WA	LP
Slipper, Hon. Peter Neil	Fisher, QLD	LP
Smith, Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn	Casey, VIC	LP
Smith, Hon. Stephen Francis	Perth, WA	ALP
Smyth, Laura Mary	La Trobe, VIC	ALP
Snowden, 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, Hon. Wayne Maxwell	Lilley, QLD	ALP
Symon, Michael Stuart	Deakin, VIC	ALP
Tehan, Daniel Thomas	Wannon, VIC	LP
Thomson, Craig Robert	Dobell, NSW	ALP
Thomson, Kelvin John	Wills, VIC	ALP
Truss, Hon. Warren Errol	Wide Bay, QLD	Nats
Tudge, Alan Edward	Aston, VIC	LP
Turnbull, Hon. Malcom Bligh	Wentworth, NSW	LP
Vamvakinou, Maria	Calwell, VIC	ALP
Van Manen, Albertus Johannes	Forde, QLD	LP
Vasta, Ross Xavier	Bonner, QLD	LP
Washer, Malcom James	Moore, WA	LP

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

<b>Members</b>	<b>Division</b>	<b>Party</b>
Wilkie, Andrew Damien	Denison, TAS	Ind
Windsor, Anthony Harold Curties	New England, NSW	Ind
Wyatt, Kenneth George	Hasluck, WA	LP
Zappia, Tony	Makin, SA	ALP

#### **PARTY ABBREVIATIONS**

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

### **Heads of Parliamentary Departments**

Clerk of the Senate—R Laing  
Clerk of the House of Representatives—B Wright  
Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—A Thompson

## GILLARD MINISTRY

Prime Minister	Hon. Julia Gillard MP
Deputy Prime Minister, Treasurer	Hon. Wayne Swan MP
Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government	Hon. Simon Crean MP
Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations and Leader of the Government in the Senate	Senator Hon. Chris Evans
Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth	Hon. Peter Garrett AM, MP
Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy and Deputy Leader of the Government in the Senate	Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy
Minister for Foreign Affairs	Hon. Kevin Rudd MP
Minister for Trade	Hon. Dr Craig Emerson MP
Minister for Defence and Deputy Leader of the House	Hon. Stephen Smith MP
Minister for Immigration and Citizenship	Hon. Chris Bowen MP
Minister for Infrastructure and Transport and Leader of the House	Hon. Anthony Albanese MP
Minister for Health and Ageing	Hon. Nicola Roxon MP
Minister for Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs	Hon. Jenny Macklin MP
Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities	Hon. Tony Burke MP
Minister for Finance and Deregulation	Senator Hon. Penny Wong
Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research	Senator Hon. Kim Carr
Attorney-General and Vice President of the Executive Council	Hon. Robert McClelland MP
Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry and Manager of Government Business in the Senate	Senator Hon. Joe Ludwig
Minister for Resources and Energy and Minister for Tourism	Hon. Martin Ferguson AM, MP
Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency	Hon. Greg Combet AM, MP

**[The above ministers constitute the cabinet]**

### GILLARD MINISTRY—*continued*

Minister for the Arts	Hon. Simon Crean MP
Minister for Social Inclusion	Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
Minister for Privacy and Freedom of Information	Hon. Brendan O'Connor MP
Minister for Sport	Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity	Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP
Assistant Minister to the Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation	Hon. Bill Shorten MP
Minister for Employment Participation and Childcare	Hon. Kate Ellis MP
Minister for Indigenous Employment and Economic Development	Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
Minister for Veterans' Affairs and Minister for Defence Science and Personnel	Hon. Warren Snowdon MP
Minister for Defence Materiel	Hon. Jason Clare MP
Minister for Indigenous Health	Hon. Warren Snowdon MP
Minister for Mental Health and Ageing	Hon. Mark Butler MP
Minister for the Status of Women	Hon. Kate Ellis MP
Minister for Social Housing and Homelessness	Senator Hon. Mark Arbib
Special Minister of State	Hon. Gary Gray AO, MP
Minister for Small Business	Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Minister for Home Affairs and Minister for Justice	Hon. Brendan O'Connor MP
Minister for Human Services	Hon. Tanya Plibersek MP
Cabinet Secretary	Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP
Parliamentary Secretary to the Prime Minister	Senator Hon. Kate Lundy
Parliamentary Secretary to the Treasurer	Hon. David Bradbury MP
Parliamentary Secretary for School Education and Workplace Relations	Senator Hon. Jacinta Collins
Minister Assisting the Prime Minister on Digital Productivity	Senator Hon. Stephen Conroy
Parliamentary Secretary for Trade	Hon. Justine Elliot MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Pacific Island Affairs	Hon. Richard Marles MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Defence	Senator Hon. David Feeney
Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration and Citizenship	Senator Hon. Kate Lundy
Parliamentary Secretary for Infrastructure and Transport and Parliamentary Secretary for Health and Ageing	Hon. Catherine King MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Disabilities and Carers	Senator Hon. Jan McLucas
Parliamentary Secretary for Community Services	Hon. Julie Collins MP
Parliamentary Secretary for Sustainability and Urban Water	Senator Hon. Don Farrell
Minister Assisting on Deregulation	Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Parliamentary Secretary for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	Hon. Dr Mike Kelly AM, MP
Minister Assisting the Minister for Tourism	Senator Hon. Nick Sherry
Parliamentary Secretary for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency	Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC, MP

## SHADOW MINISTRY

Leader of the Opposition	Hon. Tony Abbott MP
Deputy Leader of the Opposition and Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs and Shadow Minister for Trade	Hon. Julie Bishop MP
Leader of the Nationals and Shadow Minister for Infrastructure and Transport	Hon. Warren Truss MP
Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations	Senator Hon. Eric Abetz
Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate and Shadow Attorney-General and Shadow Minister for the Arts	Senator Hon. George Brandis SC
Shadow Treasurer	Hon. Joe Hockey MP
Shadow Minister for Education, Apprenticeships and Training and Manager of Opposition Business in the House	Hon. Christopher Pyne MP
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Deputy Leader of the Nationals	Senator Hon. Nigel Scullion
Shadow Minister for Regional Development, Local Government and Water and Leader of the Nationals in the Senate	Senator Barnaby Joyce
Shadow Minister for Finance, Deregulation and Debt Reduction and Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee	Hon. Andrew Robb AO, MP
Shadow Minister for Energy and Resources	Hon. Ian Macfarlane MP
Shadow Minister for Defence	Senator Hon. David Johnston
Shadow Minister for Communications and Broadband	Hon. Malcolm Turnbull MP
Shadow Minister for Health and Ageing	Hon. Peter Dutton MP
Shadow Minister for Families, Housing and Human Services	Hon. Kevin Andrews MP
Shadow Minister for Climate Action, Environment and Heritage	Hon. Greg Hunt MP
Shadow Minister for Productivity and Population and Shadow Minister for Immigration and Citizenship	Mr Scott Morrison MP
Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry and Science	Mrs Sophie Mirabella MP
Shadow Minister for Agriculture and Food Security	Hon. John Cobb MP
Shadow Minister for Small Business, Competition Policy and Consumer Affairs	Hon. Bruce Billson MP

**[The above constitute the shadow cabinet]**

**SHADOW MINISTRY—*continued***

Shadow Minister for Employment Participation	Hon. Sussan Ley MP
Shadow Minister for Justice, Customs and Border Protection	Mr Michael Keenan MP
Shadow Assistant Treasurer and Shadow Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation	Senator Mathias Cormann
Shadow Minister for Childcare and Early Childhood Learning	Hon. Sussan Ley MP
Shadow Minister for Universities and Research	Senator Hon. Brett Mason
Shadow Minister for Youth and Sport and Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House	Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Development and Employment	Senator Marise Payne
Shadow Minister for Regional Development	Hon. Bob Baldwin MP
Shadow Special Minister of State	Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP
Shadow Minister for COAG	Senator Marise Payne
Shadow Minister for Tourism	Hon. Bob Baldwin MP
Shadow Minister for Defence Science, Technology and Personnel	Mr Stuart Robert MP
Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs	Senator Hon. Michael Ronaldson
Shadow Minister for Regional Communications	Mr Luke Hartsuyker MP
Shadow Minister for Ageing and Shadow Minister for Mental Health	Senator Concetta Fierravanti-Wells
Shadow Minister for Seniors	Hon. Bronwyn Bishop MP
Shadow Minister for Disabilities, Carers and the Voluntary Sector and Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate	Senator Mitch Fifield
Shadow Minister for Housing	Senator Marise Payne
Chairman, Scrutiny of Government Waste Committee	Mr Jamie Briggs MP
Shadow Cabinet Secretary	Hon. Philip Ruddock MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary Assisting the Leader of the Opposition	Senator Cory Bernardi
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for International Development Assistance	Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Roads and Regional Transport	Mr Darren Chester MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary to the Shadow Attorney-General	Senator Gary Humphries
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Tax Reform and Deputy Chairman, Coalition Policy Development Committee	Hon. Tony Smith MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Education	Senator Fiona Nash
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Northern and Remote Australia	Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government	Mr Don Randall MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Murray-Darling Basin	Senator Simon Birmingham
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Defence Materiel	Senator Gary Humphries
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Defence Force and Defence Support	Senator Hon. Ian Macdonald
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Primary Healthcare	Dr Andrew Southcott MP

**SHADOW MINISTRY—*continued***

Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Regional Health Services and Indigenous Health	Mr Andrew Laming MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Supporting Families	Senator Cory Bernardi
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for the Status of Women	Senator Michaelia Cash
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Environment	Senator Simon Birmingham
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Citizenship and Settlement	Hon. Teresa Gambaro MP
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Immigration	Senator Michaelia Cash
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Innovation, Industry, and Science	Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Fisheries and Forestry	Senator Hon. Richard Colbeck
Shadow Parliamentary Secretary for Small Business and Fair Competition	Senator Scott Ryan

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*Tuesday, 26 October 2010*

**The SPEAKER (Mr Harry Jenkins)** took the chair at 2 pm, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

#### **QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE**

##### **Economy**

**Mr ABBOTT** (2.01 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to her pre-election commitments to fix the mining tax, to rule out a carbon tax and to stop the people smugglers, and I remind her that since the election the mining tax deal has unravelled, she has ruled in a carbon tax and there have been 24 boats with 1,209 people on them. When will the Prime Minister stop complaining and start governing by introducing policies that will fix this mess?

**Ms GILLARD**—I thank the Leader of the Opposition for his question. Let us go through it piece by piece. The minerals resource rent tax is being consulted through the Policy Transition Group and the legislation will be brought before the parliament. Then, of course, the opposition will face a fundamental choice—whether they will continue to maintain their opposition to a tax that Australia's biggest miners have agreed to pay and stand in the way of a reduction in company tax to achieve balanced economic growth, stand in the way of tax breaks for small business, stand in the way of better superannuation for Australians and an increase in national savings and stand in the way of \$6 billion of productivity-improving infrastructure. That will be a choice for the Leader of the Opposition.

On the question of tackling climate change, I do not believe in the Leader of the Opposition's simple slogans. I believe in using the opportunities of this new parliament through the Multi-Party Climate Change Committee to address the question

of pricing carbon. I reiterate to the Leader of the Opposition: if he ever wakes up to the fact that the reform road is not a demolition derby then he will be welcome, if he wants to, to join with the government in real efforts to tackle climate change and pricing carbon, to join the Multi-Party Climate Change Committee and to do something constructive rather than to seek to wreck.

On the third point that the Leader of the Opposition raises, what I said to the Australian people before the election, when I spoke to the Lowy Institute, was that this was a complex problem. Unlike the Leader of the Opposition, I was not going to use simple three-word slogans. Unlike the Leader of the Opposition, I was going to be truthful about the dimensions of the problem. I would not degenerate to using terminology like 'armada of boats' or 'peaceful invasion'. I would explain factually to the Australian people the dimensions of the problem and the regional protection framework and regional processing centre that I believe is important to the solution. In government, we have worked on that methodically, with the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship in the region just before the parliament sat pursuing dialogue on these questions.

At some point the Leader of the Opposition needs to think through whether really his political cause is advanced by being someone who is known for wrecking or whether his political cause is advanced by returning to the Liberal Party of old, which was a reform-advocating political institution. I say to the Leader of the Opposition, as I said last night, that for us to seize the benefits of prosperity, coming out as we have as strong from the global financial crisis, we need to keep walking the reform road. Now is not the time to lead the Liberal Party away from the post-1983 consensus on economic reform. Now is not the time to lead the Liberal Party into economic Hansonism. Now is not the

time to conclude that the way forward for the Liberal Party is to conduct itself as a demolition derby on the reform road.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—Members are only eating into the time of their own question time.

#### **Economy**

**Dr LEIGH** (2.06 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, why is ongoing economic reform important, and what is the government doing to boost national productivity?

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—Order!

*Mr Robb interjecting—*

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

**Ms GILLARD**—I thank the member for his question and also congratulate him on his new book, which I will be participating in the launch of later today. Congratulations do go to him. He is a member who understands the need for economic reform, as do all government members. This is a key divide in this contemporary parliament, where the government remains committed to continuing economic reform in order to seize the opportunities our nation now has, emerging as strongly as it is from the global financial crisis.

The foundation stone of economic reform is fiscal consolidation and that means that we will bring the budget back to surplus in 2012-13, but economic reform requires us to do more. It requires us to lift the speed limits on the economy, to make sure that we are investing in the drivers of productivity and participation. That is why the government is committed to a reform program which includes cutting company tax. We want to see balanced economic growth. We want to see Australian companies strong. Our reforms include special benefits for small business,

because we understand that in the modern economy small business people are drivers of economic growth.

Our reform program also lifts the speed limits of the economy by investing in infrastructure—that is, traditional infrastructure like roads, like rail, like ports, but in the 21st century it is also the infrastructure of our age: the National Broadband Network. That is why we are committed to delivering the National Broadband Network—so that our nation does not end up exporting jobs to places like Korea and Singapore because they have better economic infrastructure than us.

Reform and lifting the speed limits of the economy also requires investments in skills, in human capital, and the government remains committed to its transformational agenda in human capital, ranging from the education of our smallest children through school education, vocational education and training and into universities. We also remain committed to delivering a seamless national economy. Australian business should not be tied up in red tape because of the existence of differential regulation in different parts of the country. This remains a key reform driver for this government, including in the area of occupational health and safety.

We intend to take the market based tools of reform into the areas of education and health to drive further reform. It was a great pleasure yesterday, with the Minister for Health and Ageing and the Treasurer, to talk publicly in this place about our health reform agenda, one that now appears to be opposed by the Liberal Party. We will also bring a reform drive to the question of pricing carbon and dealing with water. Our nation deserves leadership on these questions. We cannot afford to see the Liberal Party in this place turn its back on reform. We will continue to drive reform, but we do say to the

Liberal Party: now is the time to stay determined on a reform course; do not submit to economic Hansonism; do not submit to the Leader of the Opposition's leadership approach of looking for things to wreck rather than things to build.

#### Asylum Seekers

**Mrs MOYLAN** (2.11 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship. I refer the minister to his comments on ABC Radio Perth on 17 September that:

I've certainly made no decisions or no announcements about Northam ... I'd talk ... to the relevant shire there and the authorities about what we were contemplating there if we were to do so and get their feedback.

Why did the minister then announce Northam as one of the sites to house asylum seekers without first consulting with the residents of Northam? Will he now personally consult with residents at the town hall meeting on 4 November and address their concerns about security and pressures on local services— (*Time expired*)

**Mr BOWEN**—I thank the honourable member for her question and I thank her for the positive way she has engaged on this issue in her conversations with me and with the government. I am more than happy to talk to the Shire of Northam, as we have done and as I will do in coming weeks. I am also happy to talk to other communities, as I have done in Inverbrackie, for example. As a further example, the House might be interested to know that yesterday I had a very constructive discussion with the mayor of Adelaide Hills, Mr Cooksley. He raised with me the impact on local health services and I reassured him that there would be no impact on local health services.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—Order! If an interjection is worth a death stare in a TV studio, in the chamber it is worth the Deputy Leader of

the Opposition listening in silence and obeying the standing orders.

**Mr BOWEN**—I was saying that yesterday I had a very constructive discussion with the mayor of Adelaide Hills. The mayor of Adelaide Hills asked me to examine, for example, not only making sure that there is no negative impact on health services but also investigating whether there may be positive impacts on health services from the opening of the facility at Adelaide Hills. I told him I was more than happy to explore that with him in consultation with the community.

*Mr Briggs interjecting—*

**Mr BOWEN**—That is the sort of thing a local leader can achieve when they interact positively with the government instead of undertaking political stunts like the member for Mayo.

**Mr Morrison**—I raise a point of order on relevance, Mr Speaker: the minister was asked why he did not consult before he made the decision, not what he is doing after.

**Mr Briggs**—He is out of his depth.

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Mayo will be out of his depth in the sense of being out of the chamber if he continues to interject. The minister will relate his answer directly to the question.

**Mr BOWEN**—Just as I have interacted with Mayor Cooksley, I will continue to interact with Mayor Pollard—just as I have interacted with Premier Rann as late as today, just as I consulted with Premier Barnett before making the announcement about Northam—

*Mr Morrison interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Cook!

**Mr BOWEN**—just as I consulted—

*Mr Morrison interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Cook!

**Mr BOWEN**—I consulted with Premier Barnett by way of phone call to him in the lead-up to the decision on whether to embark on Northam. It was a very positive conversation with Premier Barnett, which is perhaps unsurprising as he was the person who suggested a detention facility be established at Northam. Perhaps it was unsurprising given he wrote to my predecessor asking why we don't explore Northam as a potential opportunity.

I will certainly continue to interact not only with the honourable member for Pearce, who takes a constructive approach to this matter, but also with the state member, Mr Grills, who I must say has been particularly constructive. He has stated that he sees this as an opportunity for the people of Northam, that he wants to talk to people like those in Derby who have found that having a detention facility in their electorate can be a very positive thing.

**Mr Morrison**—You said you had referred to them before the decision.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The member for Cook, for the third time!

**Mr BOWEN**—The sorts of things that can be achieved are shown, for example, in the electorate of the member for Leichhardt. I noticed this morning the acting chair of the Weipa Town Authority saying the department of immigration has interacted very positively with the community, that the consultation has been very positive indeed and that he expects great benefits for the people of Weipa. That is what you can achieve when you interact positively with this government.

**Mr Morrison**—The question was about Northam. You've got no answer about how you didn't consult.

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Cook for the fourth time!

**Mr BOWEN**—That is what the member for Pearce has asked to happen, and that is what will happen from my point of view. I am more than happy to do that, but I will not engage in political stunts like the member for Mayo seems to be intent on doing.

**Mr Morrison**—We are talking about Northam.

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Cook for the fifth time! If the member for Cook listened instead of rabbiting on while the minister was answering, he would perhaps have understood that on this occasion the minister had the decency to relate his comments about other parts of Australia to the original question.

#### **Health Reform**

**Ms OWENS** (2.16 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. How is the government both modernising our economy and reforming our health and hospital system to assist and create opportunities for all Australian families, and are there any risks of not proceeding with this reform agenda?

**Ms GILLARD**—I thank the member for Parramatta for her question. I know she is concerned about the delivery of health services and facilities to her local community. Yesterday, with the Treasurer and the minister for health, both outside the chamber and within it we alerted the parliament to the fact that we were bringing to the parliament the foundation stone of our health reform agenda. Of course we have been driven to seek health reform, first because we inherited a health system that was short of doctors, short of nurses and short of money, and of course the Leader of the Opposition knows all about that, having been the health minister responsible.

We also inherited a situation where the system was plagued by cost shifting and blame shifting. There were no real incentives for the federal government to drive activity

in prevention and in primary care, to keep people out of hospital. We were seeing an unsustainability emerge where the biggest burden for hospital funding was increasingly falling on the level of government with the lesser fiscal capacity to deal with that burden, and that level of course was the state governments. That unsustainability had come about because the percentage of the Commonwealth's revenue to hospitals had gone dramatically down under the former government, the Howard government, and under the leadership of the current Leader of the Opposition. At the same time, the system lacked efficient price signals and it lacked national standards.

We are determined to change that. We are bringing legislative propositions before this parliament to deliver the foundation stone of health reform, which is of course a change to arrangements between the federal government and state governments. Key to this reform is the federal government stepping up to a 60 per cent share of the costs of hospitals as well as paying 100 per cent of the costs of primary care. This reform agenda comes with the setting of efficient prices for hospital activities. It comes with a focus on transparency and quality. It comes with a focus on removing from the system the kind of cost shifting and blame shifting we have seen in the past.

Today I was very pleased to, with the minister for health, not only walk to work—we walked to Parliament House—but also a little earlier today share in an event with leaders of preventative health organisations from around Australia who are urging this parliament to support the creation of a national preventative health agency so we can better drive within the Australian community a focus on preventative health, understanding as we do that so much of the burden of disease that Australians face today is from preventable health conditions like cardiovascular

problems and indeed some cancers. We of course will have this focus on reform.

I was very disturbed to see in today's newspapers that it appears that despite all of the things he mused about as health minister—the Commonwealth stepping up to a greater share, having transparent national standards—the Leader of the Opposition is positioning to try and wreck this health reform. Can I say to the Leader of the Opposition, this would be a very poor choice if he cares about health services for Australians.

#### Asylum Seekers

**Ms JULIE BISHOP** (2.20 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. I refer the minister to his meeting with foreign ministers from East Timor and Indonesia in New York in September. What advice has the minister provided to the Prime Minister on the prospects of East Timor hosting her regional processing centre?

**Mr RUDD**—I thank the Deputy Leader of the Opposition for her question. In addition to meeting the foreign ministers of East Timor and of Indonesia on these matters, I have had discussions with the foreign ministers of Afghanistan and Pakistan on these matters as well—as you would expect because, in dealing with the challenge of people smuggling and irregular people movements around the world, you are dealing with global factors and you are dealing with source countries, transit countries and destination countries.

On the question of the response by those foreign ministers to the discussions I had with them, they agreed, as the minister for immigration has said subsequently, that these matters will be progressed through the Bali process, because that involves all regional countries. Furthermore, in the participation of the Bali process I will have further meetings with the Indonesian Foreign Minister in Bali in December. That is as it should be.

**Ms Julie Bishop**—Mr Speaker, there are still three minutes and he has not answered.

**The SPEAKER**—The Deputy Leader of the Opposition does not have the call.

#### **Economy**

**Mr PERRETT** (2.23 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on the importance of bipartisanship to continuing economic reform?

**Mr SWAN**—I thank the member for Moreton for his very important question.

*Opposition members interjecting—*

**The SPEAKER**—Order! A question has been asked. The Treasurer has been given the call. The Treasurer is responding to the question. He should be heard in silence.

**Mr SWAN**—For over 25 years, Australia has had a very proud record of fundamental economic reform. That fundamental economic reform has spanned three governments and it is pretty fair to say that there has been a degree of bipartisanship in that fundamental economic reform—until recently.

Let us just go through where Australia is at the moment. It was the underlying resilience of the Australian economy, as well as the timely and powerful stimulus that this government put in place, that meant this developed country avoided a recession. Part of that resilience has been due to economic reform over 25 years. There is perhaps no figure which is more important for Australians to focus on than the fact that there have been something like 360,000 jobs created in Australia in the past year alone—that is, 360,000 additional breadwinners in this economy. When you think of the fact that there have been something like 30 million jobs lost internationally, this is really a stunning record for Australia. What it means is that the Australian economy has been much more resil-

ient in the face of global shocks than many other developed economies.

The fundamental reforms that have been put in place over the past 25 years are a very important part of that outcome. Floating the dollar was a very important part of that outcome. Putting in place international competition, deregulating the financial sector, ensuring a flow of credit to the economy and having strong financial institutions have been very important parts of that. Competition policy has also been a very important part of that. There has been bipartisan agreement on those fundamental reforms. National superannuation has been increasing our savings pool and to some extent there has been agreement here about that, although on occasions those opposite have opposed what we have done in superannuation.

What lesson this teaches us is that the reforms of today are tomorrow's prosperity. What this government is putting in place through tax reform, through lower corporate rates, investment in infrastructure through the NBN, and what we are doing to introduce a price on carbon is tomorrow's prosperity. Unfortunately we are not seeing the same degree of bipartisanship that we have seen in the past and which is so essential to Australia's prosperity.

I know Mr Costello and Mr Howard do not see eye-to-eye much these days, but they can agree on one thing: their economic legacy is at risk from all of the irresponsible people opposite. They can certainly agree on that. For our part, the government will concentrate on fundamental economic reform to support jobs and prosperity for all Australians.

#### **Asylum Seekers**

**Mr CRAIG KELLY** (2.27 pm)—My question is to the Prime Minister. In question time yesterday, the Prime Minister refused to rule out using other defence facilities for

detention centres in the future. Instead, she referred back to her statement on 18 October that named five sites: new centres at Woodside and Northam, the expansion of Darwin Airport Lodge, and contingency sites at Darwin and Melbourne. Besides those five centres, will the Prime Minister now rule out using other defence bases or any other Commonwealth land for detention centres in the future?

**Ms GILLARD**—I thank the member for Hughes for his question. The federal government has announced its plans. We have no other plans than the plans we have announced. They are the ones that we will proceed with. We announced those plans and ensured that there was transparency because we were well aware that in many parts of Australia people with no solution to this complex problem were out raising fear in local communities and we believe that to be inappropriate. We have provided clarity about our long-term plans.

**Mr Pyne**—Mr Speaker, on a point of order as to direct relevance: the Prime Minister is answering in the general, and she was asked very specifically whether she would rule out using other military bases or Commonwealth land for detention facilities.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The Manager of Opposition Business will resume his seat. The Prime Minister is responding directly to the question.

**Ms GILLARD**—The answer I gave to the question yesterday stands. I refer the member to the information we released at the time we announced our plans.

**Mr Morrison**—If you are not doing it, rule it out.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The member for Cook will leave the chamber for one hour under standing order 94(a).

*The member for Cook then left the chamber.*

**Ms GILLARD**—If the member who asked the question has a very specific local concern that he wants an answer to then, of course, my door is open, as is the Minister for Immigration and Citizenship's, to give him a very specific answer.

**Mr CRAIG KELLY**—My supplementary question is to the Prime Minister. Further to the Prime Minister's answer, will she rule out using the Holsworthy military base as a possible detention centre?

**Mr Melham**—You were going to make it an airport.

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Banks! Whilst the member for Banks was outside of standing order 65(b) and is very lucky, he would have had 20 compatriots on my left leave with him if I had been applying the ruling. I do not know what is in the water today, but people should settle down. The question has been asked and the Prime Minister has the call.

**Ms GILLARD**—The answer to the member's question is this: if the member has people in his local community who ask him that question then he should say to them very clearly and very directly that there are absolutely no plans for a detention facility at that base. As he well knows, it is a working defence base and if he gave any other answer, if he in any way tried to raise fear or apprehension in local community members, he would not be telling them the truth. I am sure that the member, as a new member of parliament, would want to go back to his constituents and tell them the truth. So, if any of his constituents—

**Mrs Bronwyn Bishop**—Mr Speaker, I rise on a point of order. I refer you to page 553 of the *House of Representatives Practice*, which dealt with the old definition of 'relevant' when it was a general issue and

not, under the new standing orders, when it must be a direct answer. Under the old standing orders, for the Prime Minister to say that she was not considering or contemplating opening a new detention centre would have been relevant. She was asked, 'Will she undertake not to open one at Holsworthy?' Under the new definition of directly relevant, she has to answer that question to be within the new meanings.

**Government members**—She did.

**Mrs Bronwyn Bishop**—No, she did not; she said 'no intention'.

**The SPEAKER**—The member for Mackellar will sit down! A point of order is a point of order not an opportunity to get up and debate. When members leave after question time, I suggest they look at some of the responses in the greens today. When they have the opportunity to read them in the quiet, they might understand what they missed by not listening when there was continual interjection. The Prime Minister has been directly relevant to the question. If, in fact, the answer has continued on because some people could not sit quietly, including those who wish to jump up at the drop of a hat on points of order, that is not my problem. The Prime Minister has the call and I assume that she will be in conclusion.

**Ms GILLARD**—Thank you, Mr Speaker, I actually had one more sentence to say when the member raised a point of order. My final sentence is: should the member be approached by any constituent who has any concerns then he should look them in the eye and say, 'There is absolutely nothing to be concerned about.' Any other answer would not be a truthful answer.

#### **Electricity Prices**

**Mr MURPHY** (2.35 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Climate Change and Energy Efficiency. Will the minister update the House on the current debate surrounding

increases in electricity prices and how uncertainty over a carbon price relates to that debate?

**Mr COMBET**—I thank the member for Reid for his question. In a speech last night, the Prime Minister outlined a number of reasons for the increases in the price of electricity over the last few years which have impacted of course on households. Principal amongst those reasons has been the need for significant investment in our network infrastructure—that being the more 850,000 kilometres of poles and wires which deliver electricity across the country. The House will be interested to learn that it is now estimated that \$42 billion of network investment will be required over the next five years just to maintain reliable electricity supply and to meet growing demand for electricity. This is the main driver of the higher electricity prices that households are now facing.

**Mr Hunt**—Hang on. Demand is going up even though prices have gone up.

**The SPEAKER**—Hang on, member for Flinders. Have you read standing order 65(b)? Read it now or, if you do not wish to read it, you can leave for one hour under 94(a). But I suggest you just read the standing order. The minister has the call.

**Mr COMBET**—He's reaching for the standing orders, so that is encouraging.

**The SPEAKER**—The minister will get back to the answer.

**Mr COMBET**—However, with the pressures that are already in the system putting pressure on electricity prices, the uncertainty over carbon pricing is creating a new pressure in itself. That is because the uncertainty over the pricing of carbon is causing investment decisions, particularly in the generation sector, to be put off. It means that investment in low-pollution baseload power is being put off in favour of suboptimal forms of generation investment that are cheaper to build but

less efficient and incapable of providing baseload power generation over the longer term.

The CEO of the Energy Supply Association of Australia, Mr Brad Page, has indicated this in some recent figures. For example, in 2009 the estimated capital expenditure for existing and new electricity generation plant over the next five years was \$18 billion. However, in 2010 that figure for planned investments fell to \$8.2 billion, and Mr Page cited the uncertainty over carbon pricing as one of the reasons that had occurred.

Simply put, the delay in investment due to the lack of a carbon price threatens to put up electricity prices in the future because sub-optimal investment decisions will be made. The fact of the matter is this: a carbon price will provide certainty to investors, allowing them to make the most efficient long-term investments in baseload generation capacity in our energy sector, and that investment, based upon certainty in the sector with a carbon price, will in fact reduce the impact of price increases that need to be made in the energy generation sector.

So, to be clear about it: without a price on carbon, investment in low-emissions baseload generation will be put off and prices will rise because less efficient investments will be made. For that reason, the responsible economic position for the opposition to take is to support this important economic reform, because in fact one of the greatest economic risks we have now is the negative, carping, opportunistic policy slogans that are put forward by the opposition.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! The minister should not debate his answer.

#### **National Education Standards**

**Mr PYNE** (2.40 pm)—My question is to the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth. Does the minister

agree with the draft national curriculum that controversy surrounds Australia's war memorials and with the spokesman for the drafters of the curriculum that Gallipoli may have been unnecessarily glorified? Given the mess that the national curriculum has become, will he delay its introduction from January 2011 to January 2012 in order to get it right?

**Mr GARRETT**—I thank the honourable member for his question. I would say, in answer to his question, firstly that the Australian curriculum will actually help students learn about the Anzac tradition, including Gallipoli, Anzac Day and other important events and symbols in Australian history.

The matter that he refers to is actually the draft of the years 11 and 12 history curriculum and, as the shadow minister ought to know, there are already in place curriculum drafts, including those that deal with these matters for years 1 to 10. In fact, coming into the House I had a look at them and saw that the K-10 curriculum proposes that students consider the historical significance of an Australian war memorial, in year 2; Anzac Day, in year 3; and involvement in Gallipoli and the Anzac legend, in year 9.

The fact is that this is a draft curriculum that will go out for significant comment and consultation. It will come back to the ministers who consider these matters as a referral from the independent authority, ACARA—as you know—which is charged with doing this job. I would say to the shadow minister—

**Mr Pyne**—Mr Speaker, on a point of order: the question went to whether the curriculum would be ready by January 2011 and whether he would delay it till 2012. Clearly it won't be. He should answer that question.

**The SPEAKER**—There were two parts to the question. The minister in his response is being directly relevant to at least one of those parts.

**Mr GARRETT**—I am pointing out to those opposite that the shadow minister has a fundamental misunderstanding of the process for the development of the national curriculum, and it is quite evident in the question that you have asked. In relation to the first part of your question—

**The SPEAKER**—The minister will refer his remarks through the chair.

**Mr GARRETT**—In relation to the first part of the shadow minister's question, the fact is that all Australian governments are committed to the development and implementation of an Australian curriculum that runs all the way through from kindergarten to year 12, and it begins with English, maths, science and history. We will develop that curriculum on the basis of expert advice that is received by ministers to determine what should constitute that curriculum. In particular, as I said before I was interrupted by the shadow minister, students will learn about the contribution of Australian defence forces, about the Anzac tradition, about Anzac Day—about those important parts of our military history. That is an absolute given, from the point of view of the development of the national curriculum.

In relation to the time line: as I have said before in this House, ministers have agreed a time line for the introduction of the national curriculum and that is what we commit to.

**Mr Pyne**—I seek leave to table the document that indicates that the spokesman for ACARA asked whether we should be glorifying Gallipoli.

Leave not granted.

#### **Australian Securities Exchange**

**Mr SYMON** (2.44 pm)—My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer outline for the House the regulatory and other steps that must now take place following the announcement of a proposed corporate transac-

tion involving the ASX and what the key considerations are?

**Mr SWAN**—I thank the member for Deakin for this very important question because I do think it is important to update the House on the steps which are set out under Australian law for transactions of this type which involve the ASX. The regulatory process ensures that decisions are always taken in Australia's national interest and that the market integrity of the ASX will be preserved. A proposal of this type is subject to extensive regulatory consideration under both Australia's foreign investment policy and the Corporations Act. Australia rigorously applies a national interest test to all proposals for foreign government investment and significant private sector investment. This particularly applies to a proposal of this scale and a proposal of this importance.

The screening process to consider this proposal will be undertaken by the Foreign Investment Review Board in the normal way. FIRB will seek advice from other government agencies, including ASIC and the RBA, as to whether this proposal is contrary to the national interest. The government always has taken—and always will take—these decisions in Australia's national interest. This is the overriding consideration for foreign investment proposals.

The ASX Ltd is also subject to a 15 per cent ownership limitation under the Corporations Act. An increase beyond this threshold can only occur if a regulation is made allowing this to take place. Any such regulation would be subject to disallowance by this parliament. The transaction also requires regulatory approval from the Australian Securities and Investments Commission as well as an Australian court. As members would be aware, on 1 August 2010 the government transferred supervision of Australia's financial markets to ASIC. This reform will en-

hance the integrity of Australia's financial markets and help promote Australia as a financial services hub in the region.

Australia's financial regulators put their world-class reputation beyond any doubt during the global financial crisis. Our financial system came through all of that with strength. Australia's financial system has performed better than any other during the global financial crisis and, of course, the ASX is an important part of our financial systems architecture. So we will continue to consider all transactions with the objective of carefully and methodically building Australia's reputation as a financial services hub and, as always, we will do this in the national interest. I ask all members in this parliament to do the same.

#### **Broadband**

**Mr TURNBULL** (2.47 pm)—My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. I refer the minister to his statement of 16 October 2008:

Importantly, we established Infrastructure Australia to ensure that proper cost-benefit analysis was brought to the assessment of the nation's infrastructure needs and the merits of individual projects.

If the government's policy remains that for all major projects there should be a fully available cost-benefit analysis, why is this not the case with the National Broadband Network?

**Mr ALBANESE**—I thank very much the member for Wentworth for his question. I am pleased that, having opposed the formation of Infrastructure Australia and opposed the government's infrastructure agenda, there now appears to be—contrary to some other issues—some bipartisan support for the existence of Infrastructure Australia, for the moment anyway. The fact is that Infrastructure Australia did hand down its first infrastruc-

ture priority list. We tasked it—a body made up of representatives of the three levels of government and the private sector—to ascertain what the infrastructure priorities were for Australia.

Do you know what Infrastructure Australia had to say in their first report about the National Broadband Network and about its importance to the economy? I will quote for the benefit of the member for Wentworth where it was identified. You did not have to go through the document very far because the No. 1 priority Infrastructure Australia identified was this:

The importance of an accessible and fast broadband network to Australia's international competitiveness is almost impossible to overstate.

They get it. The Australian people get it. All the business people I spoke to at the AiG dinner last night get it. It appears that you simply do not.

**Mr Turnbull**—Mr Speaker, on a point of order on relevance: the minister has not responded to the question. He has not even mentioned the cost-benefit analysis.

**The SPEAKER**—The minister has concluded.

#### **Preventative Health**

**Ms HALL** (2.50 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Health and Ageing. What action is the government taking to deliver more preventative health programs? How have these programs been received and what is the government's response?

**Ms ROXON**—I thank the member for Shortland for this question. She has always had an active interest in health issues and health promotion within her community. As the Prime Minister mentioned earlier today in question time, the Prime Minister and I joined with a number of members of the Heart Foundation's walking group, both the Queanbeyan group and the Groovy Grannies,

who walk through the ACT to keep themselves fit and healthy. They are one of a number of national organisations that have been funded through our preventative health investments.

There is not just the Heart Foundation. I know there will be many members of this House who are passionate about cycling who would be pleased to know that Cycling Australia with the Amy Gillett Foundation is also being supported with this initiative. Fitness Australia, the Baker IDI Heart and Diabetes Institute with their Lift for Life program, the Macarthur Division of General Practice—a couple of members opposite would be particularly interested in that—and Diabetes Australia are all involved in getting the message out across the country that we can do more to manage our own health to keep ourselves fitter, to make sure that we live longer and happier lives and to take some pressure off our health system by making sure that by living healthier lives we do not come down with a number of preventable diseases which put such an enormous burden on our health system.

Today we will be debating again in the House the establishment of the preventative health agency. This agency ought to have been up and running by 1 January this year. Unfortunately, in the last parliament the opposition delayed and opposed this measure, and we hear that despite the calls of public health organisations across the country arguing that this investment should be made the opposition are again positioning themselves to vote against this measure.

Today we met with organisations that covered the whole spectrum: the Heart Foundation, the Cancer Council, the Public Health Association of Australia, VicHealth and Quit—organisations that have committed all of their energy to trying to introduce public health campaigns, better living condi-

tions, better information and desperately see the need for a national agency that can test the best evidence, can better target campaigns and allow us at last to make sure that we invest properly in preventative health.

I call on the Leader of the Opposition and the opposition to reconsider their position on this bill. I know and I must say I have some respect for the fact that the Leader of the Opposition is a bit of a fitness freak himself. He leads and sets a very good example, but not everyone across the country has that same sort of commitment and governments can help others to play a more active role in managing their own health. I will be very disappointed and I know many thousands of Australians will be very disappointed if the Leader of the Opposition allows his party to oppose this measure in the House, when instead what we could do is invest in important health reform that will save lives for many decades to come.

#### **Broadband**

**Mr HARTSUYKER** (2.53 pm)—Mr Speaker, my question is to the Prime Minister. I refer the Prime Minister to her comment on 7 September where she said:

Whether you're on the broadband in Tamworth or on the broadband in CBD Sydney ... the wholesale price for your broadband will be the same.

Will the Prime Minister rule out the recommendation in the McKinsey implementation study which recommends that NBN Co. charge regional service providers a separate amount to access transit backhaul, which would result in higher costs to regional consumers?

**Ms GILLARD**—I thank the member for his question. Following our commitment about wholesale prices being the same for regional Australia as they are for urban Australia, the government has instructed NBN Co. to take that approach to wholesale pricing. What I can guarantee to the member is

that the National Broadband Network will be delivered with wholesale prices the same for users of the National Broadband Network whether they are in Tamworth or whether they are in Tarneit in my electorate or anywhere else in the country. We are determined to make that happen.

I would also say to the member, who represents a regional area in this place, that for him and his constituents this availability of the National Broadband Network at the same wholesale price will enable a transformation of local economies and local service delivery. Consequently I would ask the member, as he moves around and talks to others on his side of politics, to be making that point about the benefits for his local community.

There appear to be three positions about the National Broadband Network in this parliament—the Leader of the Opposition’s, who wants to demolish it; the member for Wentworth’s, who wants to delay it; and that of those on this side of the House joined by regional independents, who want to build it because of the benefits for Australia, particularly regional Australia.

#### **Broadband**

**Mr MITCHELL** (2.56 pm)—Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Regional Australia, Regional Development and Local Government and Minister for the Arts. What are the benefits to regional Australia of the National Broadband Network? What steps is the government taking to ensure the needs of regional communities are a priority in the implementation of the NBN and what is the government’s response to any obstacles to the passage of the required legislation?

**Mr CREAN**—I thank the member for McEwen for his question because he has been a tireless advocate for the importance of broadband to his regional constituency. For

regional Australia this is a compelling case. Failure to address access to fast-speed broadband will see regions held back. The Local Government Association conducted a very extensive survey about this some four or five years ago and found that those regions that had broadband access were the ones that grew faster and created jobs. In fact it concluded that the failure to provide fast-speed broadband was costing the regions close to \$3 billion in lost product and up to 30,000 jobs.

That is why we on this side of the House are committed to ending the digital divide. We know that the capital cities have more access to it than the regions. We want the regions to grow, but they are not going to be able to do it unless they have access to the infrastructure that enables them to do it. That is why we are embarking on the National Broadband Network rollout, a rollout that will increase the capacity of the network but also deliver it, in the way we have constructed it, at a uniform wholesale price. In other words, we are addressing both availability and affordability.

High-speed broadband is essential for businesses who are looking to establish in regional Australia because it is fundamental to them accessing global supply chains. As a former trade minister I understand the importance of nations accessing global supply chains, but unless we are enabling the regions to do it they will be left behind. Beyond the e-commerce opportunities there are huge opportunities with our broadband rollout for e-health and e-education, both areas in which this government has committed substantial resources to build the physical infrastructure. What we want to do is build the telecommunications and broadband infrastructure so that the applications, insofar as those institutions are concerned, are affected. This is not just about improving voice

access over the internet; it is the data access. So this is essential to regional development.

Now I am asked: are there any obstacles to this? Too right there are. There is the delay by those sitting on the other side of this chamber as to every attempt that we have made to roll this out. That delay, that procrastination, on that side of the House will hold regional Australia back. I urge all of those that argue that they have got an interest in regional economic development to understand the fundamental importance of this, as to enforcing it and encouraging it, and to get behind our initiatives and support them.

#### **Murray-Darling Basin**

**Mr WINDSOR** (3.00 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities and it relates to the Murray-Darling guide and specifically to quantifying the so-called interceptions to ground and surface water that could result from a change in land use, such as mining and coal seam gas extraction, in areas such as the Liverpool Plains. The minister said yesterday that he took a ‘highly precautionary approach’ to artesian water in Queensland. What views does the minister have in relation to groundwater accounting in the Murray-Darling Basin Plan and mining and gas approvals when the science relating to connectivity issues of ground and surface water and subsurface interceptions is not known? (*Time expired*)

**Mr BURKE**—I thank the member for New England for the question. One of the things that the Murray-Darling Basin guide does, which has not received much attention at all but is actually very important, is that it starts to look at a whole new way of counting all the water. There have been complaints from farmers, for example, for many years about forestry interception not being counted. There have been complaints about many different forms of interception not be-

ing counted, with irrigation pumps actually being the only sort of diversion that is taken account of.

One of the very good things within the guide which is now starting a new part of the discussion is to start to look at all forms of interception. It is quite a leap forward from where these arguments have been previously. It has not really taken off in the public discussion yet but it will be something that comes through in the consultation, and I think it is something that we certainly support. I appreciate the comments made by the member for New England in terms of New South Wales coal seam gas extraction.

*Mr Hunt interjecting—*

**Mr BURKE**—And it is marked ‘confidential’ so I do not have to table it. With respect to the similarities between some of the issues raised on the Liverpool Plains and the comments I made yesterday, the member for New England is right, and the advice that I receive from Geoscience Australia backs this up, that the science on coal seams is limited. That is why there will be some coal seams which are watertight and some which are porous. The conditions that I imposed on the Queensland projects I referred to yesterday demanded that individual testing will have to take place seam-by-seam. If the individual seams turn out to be watertight, then in those situations there is not connectivity, but where there is connectivity there needs to be either repressurisation or water actually being reinjected into the seam.

The reason for this is you want to avoid a situation where—with your water table issues on the Liverpool Plains or with the Queensland example, the Great Artesian Basin—you do not create a void of water which, because it is porous, causes water to actually backfill and therefore you lose the water you otherwise would have had access to. It is a genuine concern. Geoscience Aus-

tralia was saying there will be seams where this may apply and there will be seams where it may not. My view and what is reflected in those conditions is that that needs to be precautionary and you need to test every seam.

#### **Australia-United States Relationship**

**Ms BRODTMANN** (3.03 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Foreign Affairs. Minister, can you please advise the House of the current state of the Australia-United States bilateral relationship?

**Mr RUDD**—I thank the honourable member for her question. Honourable members of this place may be aware that this year marks the 70th anniversary of the Australia-United States diplomatic relationship. Also, next year is the 60th anniversary of ANZUS and very soon, when AUSMIN gathers in Melbourne, it will be the 25th anniversary of that meeting of Australian foreign and defence ministers and their American counterparts. It is a season therefore of significant anniversaries in the Australia-United States relationship.

Of course our engagement with the United States goes back way before the initiation of diplomatic relations to the earliest days of Federation, the Great White Fleet, working together and fighting together in World War I. But we did not establish an embassy in Washington until 1940. That was the year we also saw the birth of the Australian foreign service in its modern formation with embassies in Tokyo, in Washington and in China that year. Things may have changed since then in terms of what has occurred in China and Japan but what has been constant has been our relationship with the United States since the darkest days of World War II.

Our important relationship with the United States is built on some core values and interests which we share. When we are looking at important anniversaries, it is

worthwhile, for the benefit of the House and for the country at large, to reflect for a moment on those core values and interests: common democracies, the fact that we both support open economies and we both represent free societies, the fact that we, as founding members of the United Nations, support the continuation of a stable international order and, on top of that, that we have risen together in the past to defend any threat to that order wherever that threat has arisen. America remains the world's remaining continuing superpower. It is also overwhelmingly a force for good in the world.

Our relationship with the United States overwhelmingly reflects Australia's values and Australia's interests: our common interests in maintaining the strategic stability of East Asia and the West Pacific, our common interests in maintaining an open global economy through our continued cooperation and in the G20, and of course our common interest in widening our security and intelligence cooperation in dealing with the threat of terrorism at home and abroad and other emerging security threats as well. The 25th meeting of AUSMIN will occur in Melbourne. I am advised that this is the first time that Melbourne has hosted AUSMIN, and it will be a great opportunity for the city to showcase Australia to our distinguished American visitors. The Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, the Secretary of Defence, Bob Gates, together with the defence minister and I, will be attending the meeting and the Prime Minister will be meeting separately with our distinguished American visitors.

Our agenda will be focusing on Afghanistan; the subject of debate in this House during the last week and in the Senate this week and, of course, developments in the wider Middle East including the continuing threat to security in our region represented by the Iranian nuclear program. Also we will be discussing the future of strategic stability in

the Asia-Pacific region. That, of course, relates to the emerging new architecture of our region, the East Asia Summit, which, for the first time, includes the United States and Russia, which is a good development from the Australian national interest perspective.

AUSMIN also provides an opportunity for deep and substantive engagement on the bilateral defence relationship where the defence minister, of course, will take the lead. Secretary Clinton and Secretary Gates will be welcome guests in Australia, welcome guests on this 25th anniversary of AUSMIN and welcome on this 70th anniversary of the Australia-United States diplomatic relationship.

#### **Broadband**

**Mr TUDGE** (3.08 pm)—My question is to the Minister representing the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy. Is it correct that Exetel, an internet service which provides NBN services in Tasmania, has only 18 customers for its high-speed broadband offer? Is this the same offer that on 9 May was described by Senator Conroy as: 'A paradigm-shifting, game-changing pricing structure'?

**Mr ALBANESE**—I thank the member for what is, I think, his first question in this place and welcome him to this place. Certainly, it is a fact that the rollout and take-up of the NBN in Tasmania is up to 11 per cent. That, indeed, is within the first three months.

If those opposite understood the NBN rollout, they would know that NBN Co. is a wholesaler. It builds the equivalent, if you would like, of the railway track. Then we have the railway track of the 21st century and then we have retailers offering services on top of that. There are four retail service providers in Tasmania offering a range of services. The take-up rate is above expectations because it is normal practice that people will take up the new retail service pro-

viders once their existing internet contract with a service provider has expired.

In spite of all the negativity of those opposite the take-up rates are above that which were anticipated. This is a good program; it is on track; it is successful; and it has been welcomed by people in Tasmania. It is extraordinary that those opposite are intent on playing a wrecking game when it comes to the National Broadband Network.

#### **WikiLeaks**

**Mr MELHAM** (3.11 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Defence. Will the minister advise the House on the outcome of the Defence review of WikiLeaks' release of material on Afghanistan and the most recent release of material on Iraq?

**Mr STEPHEN SMITH**—I thank the member for his question. In general terms, of course, the unauthorised release of any classified military documentation is a matter of most serious concern. In the example that the member has referred to, not just Australia but the United States, the United Kingdom, NATO and ISAF have all condemned the unauthorised release of such materials. That is for the very obvious reason that the release of such materials can put security operations at risk. That means it can put Australian lives at risk. It can also put at risk the lives, safety and wellbeing of individuals who assist, in general terms, in theatre either in Afghanistan or previously in Iraq.

As the member has referred to, in July of this year, WikiLeaks released some 90,000 documents in respect of NATO and ISAF military efforts in Afghanistan. My predecessor minister for defence, Senator Faulkner, established a Defence task force to painstakingly examine those 90,000 documents to see whether any prejudice arose to Australia's interest, to see whether any adverse implications arose for the security of our operations

and whether any adverse interest arose so far as individuals were concerned.

As I indicated over the weekend I am very pleased to advise that that task force has now completed its deliberations. It provided me with its report on Friday and later this afternoon Defence will formally release the findings of that review. In general terms, there has been no adverse implications for our national security interests. Over the weekend members would have also seen a subsequent release by WikiLeaks of some 400,000 documents relating to Iraq dating back from 2004 to 2009. With the benefit of the experience we have had over the Afghanistan documents, that task force will now continue its work in respect of those documents for precisely the same reason.

There has been a lot of publicity arising from the release of these documents so far as detainee management is concerned. Can I say as a general proposition, Australia takes its responsibility, so far as detainee management is concerned, very seriously. At all times we want to ensure that not just our domestic legal obligations but our international legal obligations are catered for and met.

In the case of Iraq, of course, we were not responsible for any detainee or detention facilities at all. When, in the past, questions of detainee management have been raised in respect of Iraq, Defence effected a review, and in June 2004 that review was reported to the Senate, which drew to attention that there were no adverse implications so far as Australia or Australian personnel were concerned with respect to detainee management matters in Iraq.

Of course, if any matters of concern arise in this context, they will be exhaustively investigated in the usual way. In due course—and it will take some time given the volume of documents—a similar public announce-

ment will be made on any implications in respect of the recent documents for Australia's national security interests.

#### **Murray-Darling Basin**

**Mr PYNE** (3.15 pm)—My question is to the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities. The chairman of the Murray-Darling Basin Authority has publicly said that he advised the minister for water prior to the release of the guide that the authority's interpretation of the Water Act put the environment ahead of social and economic factors. If so, why did the minister wait until after the release of the guide to seek his own legal advice? How can the Australian people have any confidence in the handling by the minister for water of this mess when he sat by and allowed a flawed guide to be released?

**Mr BURKE**—I thank the honourable member for Sturt for the question. When that issue was first raised with me by Mike Taylor in a meeting which I think was held here in Parliament House, I asked the department to consider whether that was also their view. It was not.

*Mr Pyne interjecting—*

**Mr BURKE**—It was not their view and they spoke to the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, advancing their opinion. There was a difference in opinion between my department and the authority, and I took the view at that point that the right thing to do was to get independent legal advice and to announce that, whatever it said, I would be releasing that advice publicly, which is what I did yesterday.

#### **Research and Innovation**

**Mr GEORGANAS** (3.16 pm)—My question is to the Minister for School Education, Early Childhood and Youth, representing the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations. Would the minister

update the House on the National Competitive Research Grants announced recently?

**Mr GARRETT**—I thank the member for Hindmarsh for his question. This government recognises that investment in research and innovation is absolutely crucial to our future—to building prosperity, to lifting Australia's living standards, to responding to environmental challenges. Yesterday my colleague the Minister for Tertiary Education, Skills, Jobs and Workplace Relations, Kim Carr, announced National Competitive Research Grants to support 1,126 new research projects. These grants are recommended by the Australian Research Council and the government will provide a total of some \$376 million to make the projects possible. There are some 931 projects through a commitment to the Discovery Projects scheme, with some \$318 million provided there, supporting fundamental research by individuals and teams which is judged to be of an excellent quality.

There are a further 186 projects funded through the Linkage Projects scheme. Here we invite collaboration between higher education researchers and partners outside the sector, including from industry. It was very pleasing to see some nine projects put forward by talented Indigenous Australian researchers, which will be funded through our \$2 million Discovery Indigenous Researchers Development scheme. Also pleasing is that, in the Discovery Projects, the success rate for women matches that of men for the first time in five years. This is an achievement that this government is determined to entrench as business as usual.

I do want to especially congratulate researchers at the University of New South Wales, in the electorate of Kingsford Smith—an outstanding institution that I know well—who received some \$34 million to fund about 115 innovative research projects, including approximately \$430,000 for

a child development study to identify risk factors to improving children's health and educational achievements. Other investments and support include some \$680,000 to the University of Western Australia to develop better tools for imaging cancer and guiding related surgical procedures.

I could not help noticing a \$163,000 grant to RMIT to develop clothing that can generate energy—a matter quite close to our hearts in this House. The research team expects that we will soon be seeing sports gear and defence uniforms that can power low-energy portable devices. Through the mists of time, I think Dick Tracy would be pleased.

I want to stress that this government has increased Commonwealth spending on research and innovation by some 34 per cent, compared with the previous coalition government. We know that supporting world-class research is absolutely essential to our nation's future and we will continue our commitment to ensuring that the best and brightest provide the research that we need to meet the challenges of the future.

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

#### DOCUMENTS

**Mr ALBANESE** (Grayndler—Leader of the House) (3.20 pm)—Documents are presented as listed in the schedule circulated to honourable members. Details of the documents will be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings*, and I move:

That the House take note of the following documents:

Army and Air Force Canteen Service—Frontline Defence Services—Report, incorporating the annual report on the monitoring of the equal employment opportunity (EEO) management plan—2009-10.

Australian Industrial Relations Commission and Australian Industrial Registry—Report for the period 1 July to 31 December 2009.

Australian Reward Investment Alliance—Commonwealth Superannuation Scheme, Public Sector Superannuation Scheme and Public Sector Superannuation Accumulation Plan—Report for 2009-10.

Australian Statistics Advisory Council—Report for 2009-10.

Australian War Memorial—Report for 2009-10.

Centrelink—Report for 2009-10—Corrections.

Commonwealth Grants Commission—Report for 2009-10.

Defence Force Retirement and Death Benefits Authority—Report for 2009-10.

Department of Climate Change and Energy Efficiency—Report for 2009-10.

Department of the Treasury—Report for 2009-10.

Export Finance and Insurance Corporation—Report for 2009-10.

Fair Work Australia—Report for 2009-10.

Military Superannuation and Benefits Board of Trustees—Report for 2009-10.

Renewable Energy Regulator—Financial report for 2009-10.

Rural Industries Research and Development Corporation—Report for 2009-10.

Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Commission and Comcare—Report for 2009-10.

Seafarers Safety, Rehabilitation and Compensation Authority—Report for 2009-10.

Tax Practitioners Board—Report for the period 1 March to 30 June 2010.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Hartsuyker**) adjourned.

## MATTERS OF PUBLIC IMPORTANCE

### Broadband

**The SPEAKER**—I have received a letter from the honourable member for Wentworth proposing that a definite matter of public importance be submitted to the House for discussion, namely:

The Government's refusal to subject the National Broadband Network to appropriate parlia-

mentary and economic scrutiny including an independent cost-benefit analysis.

I call upon those members who approve of the proposed discussion to rise in their places.

*More than the number of members required by the standing orders having risen in their places—*

**Mr TURNBULL** (Wentworth) (3.21 pm)—The National Broadband Network is the largest investment of taxpayers' money in infrastructure in our nation's history. It has been subject to no financial scrutiny and, remarkably, the government continues to refuse to submit it to a cost-benefit analysis. In question time, the minister insulted the intelligence of this House and insulted the Australian people by pretending to suggest—or attempting to suggest—that Infrastructure Australia somehow or other endorsed his government's haphazard, reckless approach to the National Broadband Network. In fact, the reverse is the case. In October last year, Infrastructure Australia published a paper on how to make better decisions for investing in infrastructure. This is what they said:

... all initiatives proposed to Infrastructure Australia ... should include a thorough and detailed economic cost-benefit analysis. ...

... In order to demonstrate that the Benefit Cost Analysis is indeed robust, full transparency of the assumptions, parameters and values which are used in each ... Analysis is required.

And then Infrastructure Australia went on to describe that in some considerable detail.

If this project is going to make the outstanding contribution to productivity, to our national economy, that the government claim it will, they have nothing to fear from submitting it to the Productivity Commission. There will be no delay in the construction of the test sites, no delay at all, no interruption at all. There will be, however, real accountability and real, rigorous analysis of the kind

that the government have repeatedly said they are committed to but in respect of this, the biggest infrastructure project in our history, they have refused to undertake.

There is so much that we do not know about this project. We do not know how much it will cost Australians to get access to voice or broadband services over it. We do not know what its costs or revenues will be. We do not know whether it will be commercially viable as a business. One broking firm suggested that it would have a net present value of minus \$9 billion. Let us hope that is overly gloomy, but it is not a very promising prognosis. We do not know whether it will ever achieve the heroic take-up rates that McKinsey assumed in its implementation study—rates without precedent anywhere else in the world. And we do not know what positive or negative economic or social spill-overs the construction of the NBN will bring with it.

The fact is that everybody in this House, I am sure, is committed to the availability of fast broadband at affordable prices across Australia. We all recognise that there are areas where that is not the case, in particular in regional and remote Australia. Only this week I met with two mayors from shires in the electorate of Maranoa, the shires of Barcoo and Diamantina. The NBN is not going to give them fast broadband—they have apparently been left out—and yet, when you think of an appropriate destination for Commonwealth funds, an appropriate destination for Commonwealth investment in this area, surely those remote regions are the ones that should be prioritised. But they apparently are not going to be.

The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy, has frankly acknowledged that he has no idea what applications typical households would use over the 100-megabit-per-second

connection that he is promising, a vastly greater amount of broadband connectivity than there is any use for at the household level today. This is an important point because, if we are building, at vast taxpayer expense, capacity for which there is not an application or a need, what we are doing is making an enormous overinvestment.

Nobody argues that there is nowhere in Australia where there is adequate broadband. No-one is saying that broadband is inadequate everywhere. The argument has always been that there are areas where it is inadequate and areas where it is not available. A more prudent approach would be to deal with those areas of underservice and then, as time progresses and if demand progresses and if other technologies are not overtaking fixed line connectivity, greater connectivity can be built. 'Build it and they will come' is a proven recipe for losing billions of dollars and, in this case, losing it without any study or any analysis.

I note that earlier this year the Federal Communications Commission of the United States published a national broadband plan. It targets as the minimum broadband speed that should be available across America download speeds of at least four megabits per second. From our side of the House, we believe that the target in Australia should be not less than 12 megabits per second, but in the United States, the home of the internet, they are talking about four megabits per second. Senator Conroy is talking about 100. Why are we so confident that he is right and the Americans are wrong, as he keeps on contending? In that same report, which I would commend to honourable members, at page 17, the FCC observes that speeds of less than eight megabits per second are sufficient to deal with most uses, including two-way videoconferencing. Again, where is the need, the applications, that will consume 100 megabits per second to the household?

We have heard the Prime Minister give lectures as recently as last night and again today in the House about the perils of what she describes as 'economic Hansonism', and yet here we are with a government that is proposing to overthrow 20 years of telecommunications reform and 20 years of competition policy by creating a new government owned monopoly over fixed line communications in complete contravention of the existing competition laws. So far in breach of the existing competition laws are these arrangements, arrangements that will prevent any competition at the fixed line basis with the NBN, that the government is proposing that the parliament pass a law to exempt the creation of this massive government owned monopoly from the scrutiny of the ACCC.

The lack of scrutiny to this point of the NBN has been remarkable and, I am afraid to say, unique, anywhere in the world. The scale of this investment is without any precedent, not just in our own history. The United States is spending \$7 billion of federal government money to support broadband initiatives. On a per capita basis, we are spending 100 times more. Why are we so confident that we are so right and the Americans, in the home of the internet, are so wrong?

The government has claimed from time to time that the McKinsey-KPMG implementation study, which Senator Conroy is proud to tell us repeatedly that he paid \$25 million for, really is all you need. Yet McKinsey at least had the candour to say that they were not asked to examine alternative options, they were not asked to examine the merits of the policy; it was given to them as a fait accompli and they were simply asked to advise on its implementation.

We know that Infrastructure Australia, the expert body that the Rudd government set

up, has not been allowed to review the project, even though its whole mission is to identify, prioritise and rigorously assess infrastructure projects of national importance. We know that until a couple of weeks ago the NBN, embarking on a \$43 billion project, had not even delivered a business plan to its board, much less to its shareholder, the Commonwealth government. So for substantially more money than it would cost to buy all of Telstra this government has committed to building a new telecommunications monopoly from scratch before even receiving a business case from the management it has tasked to do so. I remind the House again of what the Treasury secretary, Dr Ken Henry, said last year:

Government spending that does not pass an appropriately designed cost-benefit analysis necessarily detracts from Australia's well-being.

That lack of rigour and scrutiny in this project is why on Monday I introduced a private member's bill, the National Broadband Network Financial Transparency Bill 2010. It requires the publication of a 10-year business case for the NBN and, equally importantly, refers the NBN to the Productivity Commission for a thorough cost-benefit analysis.

There is so little known about this project. There has never been so much money spent with so little scrutiny. But what little we do know, the fragments of information we have, should give all of us great cause for concern. We know the take-up rates in Tasmania have been poor, even though NBN Co. have entirely subsidised the wholesale cost of the line and is paying internet service providers \$300 for every customer they sign up. They left early customers unaware of whether they would have to buy and install a battery back-up to ensure their phone line would work during a power blackout. It was only after pressure from the media that NBN Co. revealed they would provide a battery back-up. Some customers in the early rollout sites

have reported they have had to wait up to three months for the NBN to connect them to the network.

In Singapore, we learned the authorities have fined a partnership headed by Alcatel-Lucent S\$5 million for failing to achieve on-time delivery of equipment to a broadband network in Singapore. In Australia, our NBN Co. has also selected Alcatel-Lucent for its rollout and is apparently unable to confirm or deny whether similar delays are likely to be the case here.

When the government rejects calls for a proper cost-benefit analysis it often points to a study done by Access Economics in March 2009 on the economy-wide impacts of a high-speed broadband network. This study has very little relevance to the NBN. It is not a cost-benefit analysis. It was commissioned by Telstra in support of its proposal to build a 12 megabytes per second fibre-to-the-node network to 90 per cent of the Australian population costing \$12.64 billion over 11 years. It concluded that there was a net benefit to GDP of \$9½ billion, as against a reference case which conservatively and unrealistically assumed:

... technology and bandwidth would continue to increase but at a noticeably greatly reduced rate than trends seen over the past few years.

We only have to look at what is happening in the wireless space to see that the increase in bandwidth is going at an accelerating pace.

It is worthy to reflect on this: if the GDP benefit—the net benefit—from a 12 megabytes per second network costing \$12.6 billion is \$9½ billion, how could there be a positive GDP benefit from a \$43 billion fibre-to-the-home rollout to 93 per cent of the population at 100 megabytes per second unless there was a massive and proportionate increase in productivity by increasing the speed—the connectivity—from 12 to 100 megabytes per second? This defies both

common sense and experience. From a household point of view, there are few applications that will not run satisfactorily on 12 megabytes per second. Plainly, there are diminishing returns from increasing levels of bandwidth, and that is reflected in the universal experience in the telecom sector that people will not pay a premium, if any, for an increase in bandwidth.

So, even if one were to accept this Access Economics report at face value, it should give us very serious cause to reflect whether there is any prospect of there being a net benefit to our economy from this project. Everything we learn about this project gives us cause for concern. Everything we know about good government and prudence tells us that a cost-benefit analysis is required. We have a minister who misled the House by suggesting Infrastructure Australia approved of this project and yet failed to draw to the House's attention—

**Mr Albanese**—Mr Deputy Speaker, on a point of order: the member cannot say that.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)**—The member for Wentworth did not use the word deliberately. The member for Wentworth has the call for the last few seconds.

**Mr TURNBULL**—The one thing that is absolutely clear is that Infrastructure Australia requires a rigorous cost-benefit analysis, and that is why this project will never go near Infrastructure Australia. (*Time expired*)

**Mr ALBANESE** (Grayndler—Minister for Infrastructure and Transport) (3.36 pm)—I thank the member for his contribution. We are happy to debate the National Broadband Network and the importance of the National Broadband Network to our future economy, because this debate goes to the heart of which side of this House has a plan for our future economy, has a plan for building productivity, has a plan for the jobs of the fu-

ture, has a plan for ensuring that regional Australia is able to participate fully in the economy and has a plan for the National Broadband Network, which will do nothing less than transform our economy and the way it functions. It will transform transport and help deal with urban congestion. It will transform education and the way that education services can be delivered. It will transform health through the provision of e-health services. This is not just about downloads. This is about uploads. This is about what services can be provided.

To be fair to the member for Wentworth, he is fulfilling his brief. When he was appointed to the position by his opponent, the current Leader of the Opposition, the current Leader of the Opposition said:

And who better to hold the Government to account here than Malcolm Turnbull ... who has the technical expertise and the business experience to entirely demolish the Government on this issue.

In order to demolish the NBN, they have put up a number of myths. Today we have the greatest myth of them all. They say that there has been no economic analysis. Alan Kohler wrote of the member for Wentworth in the *Business Spectator* in September:

Yesterday he was repeating the ridiculous line that the government has undertaken \$43 billion of expenditure without a detailed business plan or cost benefit study, which has been the opposition's line throughout the campaign. But what do they call the \$25 million, 546-page, implementation study by McKinsey and Co and KPMG, released publicly on May 6?

That study was comprehensive, with a comprehensive financial analysis. It found there was a strong and viable business case for the NBN. It found that there was a sufficient rate of return to cover the cost of funds and positive returns to the taxpayer by year 6. It found that the cost estimate is conservative and can be reduced.

The member opposite knows that in the next few weeks the NBN's long-term business plan will be complete. He also knows that we will reach the halfway mark for the construction of regional backhaul links—the infrastructure that we need to roll out the information highway right across the country.

He again raises Infrastructure Australia. All I can do is point to a document which has been published and tabled in this parliament, the May 2009 report titled *National infrastructure priorities: infrastructure for an economically, socially and environmentally sustainable future*, a comprehensive document produced by Infrastructure Australia under its chairman Sir Rod Eddington. The report, when discussing Australia's national infrastructure priorities, goes through seven. The first is a national broadband network—developing a more extensive, globally competitive broadband system. Indeed on page 13 of that report Infrastructure Australia recommended—and this was certainly taken up by the government—an investment from the Building Australia Fund to develop the National Broadband Network. They identified this as one of the seven priorities because they understood what an enabler of future infrastructure it was. But it is not just them. A member of this House wrote:

Equally importantly, there would be continuing ferment of innovations. With multiple service providers able to deliver services over the new network, there would be new ideas emerging all the time, including many attractive choices which are not available today.

That is a very insightful analysis from the shadow shadow minister for communications, the member for Bradfield, published in his book—a direct quote from his book *Wired Brown Land*.

The opposition also say the parliament has not had time to scrutinise this. What do they think the Senate inquiry on NBN did all that

time? It was extended five times and produced five reports. We have seen Senate committees on NBN-related bills and a discussion paper on regulatory reform and we have debated this issue constantly in parliament since prior to the 2007 election. That 2007 election was when we went to the Australian people with a plan for national broadband, because we said that the 18 plans, failed and abandoned one after the other by the coalition government, were simply not good enough. And the Australian people agreed with us and they elected Labor to office, just as the independent members had the National Broadband Network very much front and centre when they determined to ensure that Julia Gillard was in a position to become Prime Minister after the 21 August election.

This government is working hard to get the policy settings right for a competitive modern economy. Just last week we introduced into the parliament the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Competition and Consumer Safeguards) Bill 2010, again providing for structural separation—a job that should have happened when Telstra was privatised. But those opposite—in spite of the fact that some who are now opposite recognise that this is important, and I note the member for Wentworth seems to be hedging his bets and hopefully supporting this legislation—have been gradually crab-walking across to reality on the importance of structural separation. There will be an opportunity to do what should have been done many years ago.

The fact is that the National Broadband Network is absolutely critical to our future productivity. ICT is the number one way of improving productivity for the service industry and the manufacturing sector. This NBN will support 25,000 jobs a year, on average. It will provide great choice and lower prices for consumers because of the way it is struc-

tured, providing a wholesale network and then allowing a multiplicity of retailers to build on the basis of that wholesale network. It will deliver health consultations and specialist advice in real time, and an example of this is our \$392 million plan to give rural and regional Australia access to online specialist consultations. It will allow businesses in regional communities to effectively service their local and international customers. It will be vital in the delivery of smart infrastructure, and during the election campaign I announced on behalf of the government at the Infrastructure Partnerships Australia conference in Melbourne that we would regard smart infrastructure as a necessary component of future infrastructure investment.

Take urban congestion. Our investment in the Kwinana Freeway in Perth, with the installation of advanced technologies like variable speed limits and real time lane management systems, will optimise traffic flows, improve road safety and reduce emissions. This is vital, and that is why before the election I referred the smart infrastructure reference to the House of Representatives Standing Committee on Infrastructure and Communications, chaired by Ms Sharon Bird, the member for Cunningham. Or take smart energy meters, that give you an informed choice of energy source, price tariff, emissions intensity or just-in-time hot water heating. This technology will transform innovation. Associate Professor Robert Malaney, of UNSW, recently said:

If 90% of homes are connected to the NBN it will cause a paradigm shift with new ideas and innovations, things we haven't even thought about yet.

The fact is that those opposite have had 19 failed broadband plans. They said to wait for the ACCC advice, they said to wait for the implementation study, they said to wait for the government response to the implementation study and they filibustered the very bill on competition reform that was going to en-

sure a faster, cheaper and more efficient roll-out of the NBN. It is six months since the implementation study was released and the coalition simply have not moved on beyond their policy of seeking to demolish the NBN. The member for Wentworth refuses to say whether he would back the NBN in, regardless of anything any study said that would delay the system.

We know that from time to time those opposite deny that there is a problem. The member for Wentworth has said:

The NBN is an answer to a problem that has not even been identified ...

**Mr Turnbull**—What is the problem?

**Mr ALBANESE**—The problem is that we are ranked 50th for broadband speeds, and we do not have one city in the top 100 in the world for broadband speeds. Located where we are, in this region, where Korea and Hong Kong and Singapore and many of our competitors are rolling out fibre to the home, located in a region where information technology is so important for competition, I do not think that is good enough. That is the problem. We are falling behind the region. New Zealand are rolling out fibre to the home—and I say if it is good enough for New Zealand, it is good enough for us. Only last week a broadband quality survey found Australia fell from 18th to 21st in the world broadband rankings. We are going backwards at an enormous rate. The fact is, it simply is not good enough.

Those opposite have rolled out a number of statements about Tasmania. Here is what Stephen Love, from Galloways Pharmacy in Scottsdale, has had to say:

I've taken a 100 mbit speed offer, that's actually very close to the cost of my previous ADSL2+ connection. The NBN will provide huge potential, for lots of new applications, especially in health, which is of interest to me, being a pharmacist.

That is what Stephen Love has had to say. Yet those opposite continue to be critical. The implementation study said an annual take-up rate of between six and 12 per cent was what was needed to be viable, and yet we have had an 11 per cent take-up rate in three months.

Again, those opposite know full well that one contract has to be finished with a provider before anyone can go onto a new contract. They know that full well, but they come in here and ask juvenile questions which could have come from the member for Bradfield when I was on the University of Sydney SRC with him, when he was a supporter of Belinda Neal. I was right then, and I am right today. It is a student council type of strategy to wreck the National Broadband Network. The fact is that this is a vital resource for Australia. Ben Grubb, from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, has said this:

Is the federal government duping us to get us on to its national broadband network by decommissioning Telstra's copper network? I think they are and I think it is for our own good.

Accept it: It's coming and it's a free connection!

The replacement of the outdated copper network with the fibre-to-the-home network, the communications technology for the 21st century, is something about which we are very proud.

**Mr HARTSUYKER** (Cowper) (3.51 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to speak on this matter of public importance. It is a debate about appropriate technology for the future but it is also a debate about accountability. The public have a right to know that taxpayers' funds are being used appropriately and responsibly. This government is refusing the Australian people that fundamental right in regard to the National Broadband Network. The NBN is the largest taxpayer-funded investment in Australia's history. It is essential that the government provide tax-

payers with complete transparency to ensure that they are getting value for money.

Regrettably, we all know what happens when Labor tries to spend money. We had \$2.4 billion wasted on the pink batts disaster, a further \$8 billion wasted on the school hall rip-off, a \$1.2 billion blow-out in the laptops for schools program and another \$850 million wasted on solar homes. The amount of waste and mismanagement in Labor's first term is unprecedented in Australian history. In fact, it makes Whitlam seem like an amateur.

The blow-outs and mismanagement of taxpayers' money in Labor's first term demonstrate why the NBN needs proper scrutiny and why the project should be subject to rigorous parliamentary oversight. Instead of submitting to an independent cost-benefit analysis, the government is choosing to make wild claims about the kinds of services that faster broadband will offer. As Kevin Morgan wrote today in the *Australian*:

It's all starting to sound too good to be true and as such seems to have more in common with a giant Ponzi scheme than responsible and prudent policy. Like the promoters of any Ponzi scheme the government tells taxpayers: 'Trust us. You don't need to know the detail of the scheme or have a look at the books, just agree to put your money in because the dividends from the NBN down the track will be vast'.

So what has the government got to hide? Unless the government allows the Productivity Commission to conduct an inquiry into the NBN, parliament could reasonably assume that the government believes its own project is not commercially viable. Minister Conroy cites cost as a reason not to hold a Productivity Commission investigation into a project costing \$43 billion. It is the largest project in Australia's history and we cannot afford to do a study. Also, Minister Conroy uses time as an excuse. I guarantee that a Productivity Commission inquiry will not

delay the project by one minute. All of the evidence suggests that the rollout will be unviable and that is why the government does not want to conduct a productivity study.

Today we learned that the Tasmanian broadband company Exetel have only signed 18 customers to their new NBN special offer of free connection and zero sign-up costs. You would have to ask how many people have actually signed up for the 100 megabit service with Exetel. It is not exactly selling like hot cakes because they have secured a grand total of three customers. The CEO of Exetel, John Linton, could not explain to the media why the NBN is proving so unpopular in Tasmania.

NBN Co. have spent millions of dollars advertising the service available and we should expect that the small towns chosen would jump at the chance to be the first people to sign up to this new service. But when it comes to Exetel, 18 customers have signed up in the space of five months—fewer than four customers a month. If I were a company executive I would be a bit concerned about the results of this test marketing exercise. I would be a little less than encouraged, I might say. I think any prudent investor, after having a test marketing exercise that has yielded such low connection rates, would be having a very careful look at this project.

These figures are exactly why the Tasmanian government is going to force the public to receive a connection unless they expressly choose to opt out. You cannot actually get customers in the market so you force them to join in. Tasmanian government modelling estimated that only between 16 to 25 per cent of premises passed by the rollout would take up the connection on a voluntary basis. So the government will start making connection mandatory unless customers opt out.

If the opt-out model is implemented in mainland states and territories the project could blow out costs by at least \$3 billion, according to the McKinsey implementation study. Yet, the minister said that these facts are wrong despite the implementation study saying that if they are not installed on a demand-driven basis and instead are installed on an opt-out basis, the costs would blow out by \$3 billion. This is because the government will be connecting additional homes that do not require the service.

The implementation study also recommended that the government offer incentives to retail service providers in order to sign up customers. According to the study, the incentives could run to \$3 billion, or \$300 per customer that the telcos sign up. The government is so worried about the project and its viability that it wants people to be forced onto the network at taxpayers' expense.

Labor is also destroying any potential competition to the NBN by preventing broadband services being provided down the HFC cable networks owned by Telstra and Optus. The government is ensuring that broadband wholesale prices will be free from competitive pressures. As Michael Porter from the Committee for Economic Development of Australia referred to in the *Australian Financial Review*:

... it means a new state monopoly surrounded by victims of political euthanasia such as cable broadband.

Mr Porter goes on to say:

There is no physical or economic reason for denying the long-term use of the HFC cable for broadband purposes.

At last night's dinner, the Prime Minister told the Australian Industry Group that the government was committed to competitive markets, yet the government refuses to consider a competitive approach with regard to allowing the HFC network to compete with the

National Broadband Network. This is a cross-city tunnel approach to infrastructure. Just as the New South Wales government closed the roads to eliminate competition and force drivers onto the cross-city tunnel—a financial disaster, I might say—the Gillard government proposes to close the HFC network to people who might want to use that as an alternative to the NBN.

Why should we not have competition between carriers? Will it not result in a better outcome for consumers? Will it not result in cheaper prices? Will it not result in an excellent use of resources? Today, the Business Council of Australia called for a rigorous cost-benefit analysis of the NBN and, subject to its outcomes:

... alternative options for meeting the objectives of the government may need to be considered.

These comments were backed up by Reserve Bank of Australia board member Roger Corbett:

Laying cables in and between the major cities is one thing, but the cost of laying cable to secondary areas is enormous. Is it justifiable? So I am all for an independent assessment, and I ask is laying cable the most effective way of delivering these services in these areas, or is there a better way?

The government does not want that question considered. If there are better ways for improving broadband services to regional areas then surely the government should examine them before it goes ahead with spending \$43 billion of taxpayers' money and potentially producing a massive capital loss for taxpayers. Mr Porter from CEDA also said:

We need soundly financed broadband evolution, not centralised revolution. We need to fix black-holes, improve satellites, expand backhaul competition to mobile towers and towns, and so forth.

The coalition agree with these assessments, which is why we believe the NBN must be analysed by the Productivity Commission. The commission is well placed to deliver an

assessment on the economic and social costs and benefits which would be delivered under this program. Every regional member of parliament should be supportive of the coalition's bill that would require the Productivity Commission to complete an independent analysis. Equally important to identifying black spots in regional areas is the National Broadband Network Financial Transparency Bill's provision that the commission release:

... an analysis of the availability of broadband services across Australia, identifying those suburbs and regions where current service is of a lesser standard or a higher price than the best services available in ... capital cities.

This is very much an argument about transparency. This is very much an argument about ensuring that Australian taxpayers' dollars are invested for maximum benefit to the community. It is very much an argument about appropriate technologies for differing circumstances. There is great concern that the government is hiding behind a veil of secrecy. We saw Minister Conroy ducking and weaving at Senate estimates, unable to give clear and concise answers to reasonable questions, the sorts of questions the Australian public has a right to have answers to. It is absolutely essential we have a Productivity Commission inquiry into this investment. It is absolutely essential that we ensure that taxpayers' interests are protected while we deliver appropriate technology.

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM** (Braddon) (4.01 pm)—I just remind the member for Cowper what this matter of public importance is really all about; it is about obstructionism, negativism and hypocrisy. If those opposite are so enamoured with the Productivity Commission, they might have had a cost-benefit analysis done of the Adelaide to Darwin railway. They did not. They might have had a Productivity Commission cost-benefit analysis done on the privatisation of

Telstra when they flogged it off, but they did not. We know about the results of that too.

If the member for Wentworth was so keen on it, he might have had a cost-benefit analysis done of his \$10 billion water plan. What happened to that? Of course, if he did have such interest in a cost-benefit analysis by the Productivity Commission, he might have had one done of the OPEL regional broadband plan. The member for Wentworth should not come in here and pretend to be interested in advancing broadband and telecommunications in Australia. That is just nonsense. The member for Wentworth is about destroying the NBN because that is the mandate that was given to him by the leader of his party, who does not understand 'techo stuff', as he so rightly said. We know what he is all about, so do not pretend otherwise.

What are we really talking about with the NBN? I think it is really important that we remember this: it is about connecting 93 per cent of premises in Australia with optical fibre, delivering speeds of up to one gigabit per second—that is, 1,000 times faster than many people experience today—and the seven per cent of remaining premises will receive next generation wireless and satellite technology, providing speeds of 12 megabits per second or more. That is what we are talking about. Why do we need it? It was put succinctly by Rupert Murdoch, who said that the reason we need it is that internet delivery and broadband in Australia is a disgrace. I find it quite ironic that one of his stable is in the commentariat business of promoting opposition to the NBN, namely through the *Australian*. I find that pretty interesting, but no doubt he still regards it as a disgrace.

When we look comparatively internationally, why do we need it? Those opposite might not like to hear this: Australia is ranked 17th out of 31 developed countries on broadband penetration; Australia is the fifth

most expensive amongst 30 developed countries on broadband prices; Australia is 50th in terms of broadband speeds; Australia is equal last on deployment of optic fibre broadband; and Australia is 29th out of 50 countries on average connection speed at 2.6 megabits per second. No Australian city is in the top 100 cities for average internet connection speed. Australia is last in the OECD for fibre penetration for broadband. They are the facts. That is the existing situation. That is why we need the National Broadband Network.

While we are doing this, part and parcel of some of the economic benefits that we will receive through the National Broadband Network include that, on average, 25,000 jobs will be supported every year over the life of the eight-year project, peaking at 37,000 jobs. Even the Australian Local Government Association stated in its 2007-08 *State of the regions* report that \$3.2 billion and 33,000 jobs were lost to Australian businesses in 12 months due to the inadequate broadband infrastructure. That is the assessment of others of the potential of this for the future of our nation.

What have those opposite provided? We have been reminded that we are up to their 19th broadband plan, that it made up of the old technologies and it has been rejected time and again. I found it very interesting to look at some of the commentary on the opposition's broadband plan at the last election. It was that good that they dumped their opposition spokesperson. He is floating around up the backblocks somewhere, having been rewarded for his contribution—something he never believed in because he was unable to explain it; nor was their finance spokesperson or their leader able to explain it. I think that has very serious consequences for the credibility of the policies of those opposite. They do not have a credible policy but they are prepared to knock the policy that belongs here.

Some industry executives said that it 'harked back to an earlier era' and that it 'lacked vision' and was 'muddy and unclear'. I notice that the iPrimus CEO, Ravi Bhatia, referring to the policy of those opposite, said, 'What policy?' That is what those opposite were left with, yet they come in here and lecture us about providing infrastructure for the nation into the future.

The NBN plan itself has public and on-the-record support from prominent ISPs in Australia including iiNet, Internode, iPrimus, Macquarie Telecom, Adam Internet and Dodo. They are just some of the ISPs—

*Mr Fletcher interjecting—*

**Mr SIDEBOTTOM**—You will get your turn later, mate. Just settle. The Australian Internet Industry Association issued a statement supporting the NBN, outlining the problems of the alternatives based on wireless networks that those opposite have thrown up and criticising the comparative speed of broadband in Australia. I quote:

It is not a 'nice to have'; it is an essential part of the modern economy.

Indeed, it went on to say:

In the past decade Australia's internet use has grown by a staggering 12,000%. That rate is accelerating. Yet despite this, we are now ranked 50th in the world in terms of our average broadband speeds.

On 21 September Telstra announced they were signing on to be a provider of services under the NBN, launching a trial in—guess where?—Tasmania to test the compatibility of its broadband service and digital products with the NBN.

I notice that, after the drawn result in the election, those who were charged with making a decision to support one of the major parties to form government essentially supported the Gillard Labor government based on the NBN. Tony Windsor, the member for

New England, said—and I think it is very accurate:

... you do it once, you do it right and you do it with fibre.

My good friend the member for Kennedy was similarly reported as agreeing that:

The national grid and NBN and are a good thing for this country, a great thing for this country.

Others have given their support. Google and Intel have spoken out in strong support of the NBN. Indeed, Intel's managing director, Phil Cronin, said the government and industry should stop debating the need for the NBN. He said:

It's now time to move beyond debate ... the NBN has the potential to deliver significant long term benefits to consumers and small businesses alike.

Microsoft have also added their support to the NBN project, saying:

This infrastructure will be critical in the years ahead and essential for reducing costs in health and education service delivery. It will also contribute to overcoming the tyranny of distance that exists in rural and regional Australia.

I also note, in the little time left available to me, the point made by Alan Noble, Engineering Director of Google Australia, in relation to the NBN:

The national broadband network will be the digital equivalent of the trans-Australian railway linking small towns and large, bringing new life and new opportunities to our economy and our communities.

... so too will a super-fast broadband network bring a freight train of innovation to our shores.

I suggest to the member for Wentworth and those opposite that, rather than playing games, rather than being hypocritical, rather than being negative and rather than carrying out a mandate to destroy the NBN, they join the fibre future and support the NBN.

**Mr FLETCHER** (Bradfield) (4.12 pm)—According to the member for Braddon, on this side of the House we are being obstruct-

tionist and negativist in asking questions about the detail of the National Broadband Network as planned. The question is: how bad does an idea have to be before it is okay to ask some sensible questions about it? Let us be clear: we are not against broadband; very far from it. What we are against is an ill thought through, ill conceived, extravagant, badly planned venture that does not have substance and detail behind it. If that plan is before the Australian people, we say that before it is executed there ought to be a rigorous cost-benefit study conducted.

I want to make three points in the brief time available: firstly, that the history of Labor's broadband policymaking has been acutely political rather than focused on good policy; secondly, that Labor has made a very poor case for the plan it has put before the Australian people; and, thirdly, that therefore we need a cost-benefit study to make a sensible assessment of whether the nation ought to spend \$43 billion on this plan.

Labor's policymaking has been acutely political since Labor announced in March 2007 a plan to spend \$4.7 billion of public money to build a 12-megabit-per-second fibre-to-the-node network to serve 98 per cent of the population. That was a plan that was cobbled together based upon details of a proposal that Telstra made to Prime Minister Howard in 2005, subsequently released to the stock exchange, which in a footnote said that Telstra, as an offer to the government, would be prepared to build a 12-megabit-per-second network nationally in exchange for a subsidy of \$4.7 billion together with complete relief from the access requirements so that the network would become an effective monopoly. The Howard government rejected that proposal as unacceptable on competition terms. But Labor were keen to jump on it in early 2007—desperate for a policy. They did not worry about the fact that the details of the Telstra proposal involved a mix of tech-

nologies—cable, copper, satellite, wireless. No, apparently it was all going to be fibre-to-the node nationally for \$4.7 billion.

When they got into government the first thing they did was junk the well-developed, well-planned Broadband Connect policy which would by now be serving hundreds of thousands of people in rural Australia with broadband were it not for the fact that Senator Conroy cancelled it after repeating time after time during the 2007 campaign that he would honour the OPEL contract—one of the many shabby moments in Labor's disgraceful political exercise when it comes to the politics of broadband.

The best moment is when we get to April 2009 when Labour realised it had a huge problem because it could not execute the policy it promised to the people in November 2007. What therefore did it do? It decided in a purely political gesture to say, 'Let's double our bets and we will now go forward with a fibre-to-the-home proposal and we will dazzle them with talk of \$43 billion.' There was no detail behind it. The Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy, himself has admitted that the plan was approved in a two-hour flight between Melbourne and Brisbane in a discussion between him and Mr Rudd, the then Prime Minister—you might remember him. All of the details substantiating that plan could be written on the back of a beer coaster. What a disgrace. The essence of this plan which is before the Australian people is pure politics and no substance.

My second point is that Labor has made an appallingly poor case for this plan. Why is it proposing to trash a perfectly good copper network rather than use it as the basis for building something new? Why will the National Broadband Network overbuild the HFC networks which serve nearly one-third

of Australian households and which can readily deliver 100 megabits per second and in Melbourne already do? Why is Labor proposing something which would be illegal under the Trade Practices Act as it stands today? The only basis upon which its plan can be delivered involves one company in an industry, Telstra, agreeing to exit so that the other company coming into this industry, NBN, has the field free and clear for it to establish a monopoly. That would be illegal under the Trade Practices Act and the only way it can happen is because of the grubby amendment that Stephen Conroy has put before the House in the Telecommunications Legislation Amendment (Competition and Consumer Safeguards) Bill 2010 that we are considering this week.

Where are the productivity benefits that are promised? We hear about telemedicine. We never hear an explanation of why that requires fibre connected to 10 million homes. There are 1,300 hospitals in Australia. By all means, have fibre to 1,300 hospitals so we can do the direct scanning from the bush hospital into the city, but you are never going to have people having a CAT scanner in their kitchen. It makes no sense at all to fibre up every home on the basis of telemedicine. And where is the evidence that we are going to get millions of people taking this service when we know that fixed line broadband take-up has stalled in the last couple of years and most of the take-up now, most of the growth now, is in wireless? Unless we get the take-up that is unrealistically expected by Labor, this plan is going to be a financial disaster.

And why has broadband policy been outsourced to Mike Quigley and the management team of NBN Co.? It seems to now be making decisions that it will own the wireless network, it will own the satellites and it will operate them, even though the

McKinsey \$25 million study expressly recommended against that.

That brings me to my third point: why do we need a cost-benefit analysis study? Because we know the work has not been done. We heard again some verbal gymnastics from the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport earlier on attempting to insinuate that there had been a cost-benefit study. Let me again, for the record, quote from pages i and ii of the implementation study:

Explicitly it does not undertake a cost-benefit analysis of the macroeconomic and social benefits that would result from the implementation of a super fast broadband network.

Minister, let us not come into the House with that misleading claim any more. There has been no cost-benefit study and we critically need one. We need to make an assessment of whether this is a sensible use of public money. If you want to make the case that this venture is going to generate an attractive return, then you need to have a business case. The one that has been produced so far in the implementation study is weak in the extreme. It is based upon unrealistic assumptions and, in any event, Mr Quigley as the Chief Executive of NBN Co. keeps walking away from it saying, 'Well, that is not my business case; that is the implementation study.'

But the second question is: if we are to believe the claim that there are benefits to the nation which exceed the costs of building this network, if we are to believe the claim that there will be benefits in terms of productivity, medicine and education, then let us see the evidence. Let us see the systematic and careful quantification of those benefits. How many hospitals? How many scans? How many students will be educated? What will be the cost savings? Let us see those details in considering this bill, which calls for the

highly respected Productivity Commission to conduct just such an inquiry.

Let us ask the question: why is it that Labor have been running so fast from agreeing to a perfectly sensible proposal? What have they got to hide? Is it just possibly the deep-seated fear that something that was dreamt up on a two-hour flight from Melbourne to Brisbane—all of the details of which could be written on the back of a beer coaster—would not stand up to detailed scrutiny?

In fact, spending \$43 billion on a broadband network to overbuild a large amount of existing broadband infrastructure is not the best use of scarce public funds as compared to all of the other many good claims on the public purse—schools, roads, hospitals, all of the other things that governments are called upon to do. Would it not be more sensible to leave it to the private sector to build most of this network, as they have over many years, and focus government intervention on the areas where the private sector will not build? The Australian people have a right to a detailed and sensible analysis of the costs and benefits of this network, and that is what we are calling for in this bill.

**Ms ROWLAND** (Greenway) (4.22 pm)—I am so happy to be following the member for Bradfield in this debate. The member for Bradfield would know a lot about broadband compared to some of the regional members of this House because, if we look at the electoral divisions ranked by proportion of households with a broadband internet connection, with one being the worst and 150 being the best, his electorate is the best. 64.2 per cent of his electorate has a broadband internet connection. Let us have a look at one of their other speakers, the member for Cowper. His electorate is 20th worst. Yet they come into this place and say they are not opposed to broadband. If you are not

opposed to broadband, support it and let us get on with the job.

I was also really interested in the member for Bradfield's comments that we have made a poor case for the NBN. I will let the electorate be the judge of that, and they were the judge of that. We went to the election saying, 'If you vote for us, you get the NBN; if you vote for them, you don't.' And guess what? They voted for us. I am very happy that my constituents in Greenway were able to have that choice with Riverstone being the site of the first Sydney metro rollout. They voted for it and I do not need to be lectured by anyone about what case has been made when the people have decided.

We heard about Labor's NBN plan being cobbled together. If you want to see something that was cobbled together, the Liberal Party's broadband and telecommunications policy is a complete embarrassment. Of all the laughs I got during the campaign, this gave me the most. This was an absolute special. I prefer to call it the dial-up policy actually. It is a very good dial-up policy. I would be absolutely embarrassed to have gone to the election with this.

**Mr Sidebottom**—They got rid of him.

**Ms ROWLAND**—They did indeed get rid of him. It says:

The Coalition will cancel Labor's reckless and expensive National Broadband Network.

There it is in black and white. Not only was that taken to the election, if you go to the Liberal Party website today you will see that it is still their policy. It is right under the little bit that says, 'We are about less talk and more action.' I don't think so. They say there is no argument against having broadband, yet here they want to cancel the National Broadband Network. They say they want a cost-benefit analysis to decide whether or not to support it, but they have already decided they will not support it. If anyone needed an

example of why this is not about transparency but simply about fulfilling this bubble-and-squeak dial-up policy, there it is.

I was also really interested to hear the comments about why we need 100 megabits per second. I could not think 30 years ago of why I would need the internet. I do not think Alexander Graham Bell wanted an iPhone. What we are talking about are services and applications that have not even been invented yet. It is not about the download; it is all about the upload. We are not only taking our country into the future but also making us at least comparable with the rest of the world.

I refer to the report of the Broadband Commission for Digital Development, which will let us compare one hundred megabits per second to the dial-up policy of the opposition. To download a simple webpage at 56 kilobits per second takes 23 seconds; at 100 megabits per second it takes 0.01 seconds. To download a movie at 56 kilobits per second takes a week; at 100 megabits per second it takes five minutes. Do not think we are alone here. Let's have a look at the 100-megabits-per-second countries listed in the report: Australia, Denmark, Finland, Korea, New Zealand and Portugal. Singapore has a target of one gigabit per second and we are arguing about 100 megabits per second.

It comes as no surprise then that what we are seeing from the opposition is simply a continuation of the Leader of the Opposition's misunderstandings about what is needed. When the Leader of the Opposition was interviewed on *The 7.30 Report* he said:

Well, Kerry, I take your point: that if you want to drag me into a technical discussion here, I'm not gonna be very successful at it ...

Too right they are not going to be very successful at it. What we are talking about here are services and applications that are not only going to drag Australia into the future

and drag Australia up to be comparable with the rest of the world, but also transform people's lives. I find it incredible that people opposite, particularly regional members—

*Dr Jensen interjecting—*

**Ms ROWLAND**—You'll keep. Regional members who come in here and say they support broadband but do not support the National Broadband Network have some of the worst penetration rates in the country. They have people needing to travel thousands of kilometres for things like breast cancer treatments. We have already seen not only the promise but the actual reality of what e-health can deliver—the treatment of chronic disease in people's homes in real time. These things can only be delivered on a ubiquitous fibre-to-the-home broadband network. The member for Bradfield said, 'I don't know why we need every house connected.' Well he is welcome to pick the woman who does not get treatment. He is welcome to pick the child who does not get the NBN to their home. He is welcome to do that. On this side we are all about equality of opportunity, which is why only Labor is truly capable of delivering this NBN.

In terms of what the NBN is capable of delivering, everyone else gets it. I talked about Riverstone being the site of the first Sydney metro rollout. I went and visited Riverstone High School with the minister during the election campaign and I was touched to receive an email from a year 12 student, Michael Benz, who took it upon himself to analyse the policy the Liberals took to the election. What an intelligent person we have here. He said:

The NBN is a far superior proposition. It links all Australians to a superior connection with higher speed and lower latency. In the debate yesterday the opposition stated that Australians have no need for 100 megabit per second connections, but as Senator Conroy correctly stated the opposition

clearly has no imagination for what this technology will do for all Australians.

What a smart guy. He is going to go very far.

And don't just take it from me; I am happy to quote a variety of commentators about why this needs to go on without further delay. I am even happy to quote Harold Mitchell. As he said in the *Herald* on 1 October:

We now have an opposition with a ferocious commitment to 'make broadband a battlefield' and Malcolm Turnbull has been appointed to 'demolish' Julia Gillard's broadband plans.

... ..

The latest round in this sorry affair is that the opposition is calling for a cost-benefit study. The taxpayer has already shelled out \$25 million for the implementation study ... We don't need to waste any more time or money. We just need to get on with it.

I could not agree more. I also draw to the attention of the House to Senate estimates last week where, under questioning about the McKinsey report, we had departmental officials talk about the report and talk about the analysis that has been done. A Mr Murphy said the amount of analysis through the McKinsey report and other analyses of NBN far exceed probably the analysis on other infrastructure projects. So it is far from this being something that has not been analysed and has not been subjected to scrutiny. I put to this place that if you have had 18 goes and you could not get it right and you have all the commentary and everyone else in Australia 'getting it', then you should get on board and support this. I am totally in agreement with their 'less talk, more action' so let us have more action on this.

I was very interested to read this in yesterday's *Australian*: 'NBN a conspiracy against taxpayers, warns Turnbull'. Yes, it is a conspiracy right up there with the imaginary man on the moon and who shot JFK! I can see how the member for Wentworth

would think this is a conspiracy as it is a conspiracy of universal high-speed broadband for all Australians, not just those in Vaucluse and Mosman. It is a conspiracy of targeting pilot education programs for children in households where their parents and their parents' parents have never had a job. It is a conspiracy of in-home monitoring for sufferers of chronic illness. So if all that is a conspiracy then I am very happy to be signed up to it. I will end by saying that the shadow minister came in and said he had seen nothing like this anywhere else in the world, so nothing like this had gone on. I agree with him, because I have worked on projects like this in Cambodia, China, Singapore and Malaysia and I know that never has there been so much wrecking by such a weak opposition.

**Dr JENSEN** (Tangney) (4.32 pm)—Both the member for Braddon and the member for Greenway have said that the last federal election was partly won by Labor using the National Broadband Network to gain the key votes of the Independents. Indeed, both the member for New England and the member for Lyne listed broadband high on their agenda. We know now that the NBN is apparently going to be rolled out from the outside in. But the Minister for Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy, Senator Conroy, has yet to be honest with the Australian people about the financial implications for the NBN of Labor's negotiations with the Independents. He must do so now.

The NBN will be a \$43 billion government owned telco monopoly that will fail to deliver on the capabilities it has proposed. The NBN is proposed to be more than just a high-speed broadband network. The scheme is supposed to deliver a range of new technology options such as smart grid capability and open-access internet protocol TV. Despite the massive cost to taxpayers, it will fail to deliver on these key capabilities. The

government is rolling in a lemon. In effect, the minister is insisting that there should be a freeway onramp to every home, even if the householder only wants to drive the kids to school and go to the shops. And the minister insists that households pay for this onramp. Yet we see the reality: only 10 per cent take-up in the portion of the NBN currently rolled out.

This project is the largest single infrastructure investment in our nation's history and the government refuses to do a cost-benefit analysis and has not published any business case. It also refuses to allow the NBN's works to be subject to the Public Works Committee of parliament. Any government, Liberal or Labor, has never been allowed to invest so much money with so little scrutiny or accountability. So why should the Gillard government be allowed to do so now?

The cost of the scheme is of great concern, effectively \$5,000 for every home in Australia. In terms of interest alone, this will be \$350 to \$400 per annum per household, assuming 100 per cent take-up, and we see from the initial rollout that the take-up is only about 10 per cent. Worse still, this is just the cost of servicing the loan, never mind depreciation, providing service and making a profit. In reality, the current commercial price of a fibre-to-the-home connection is less than \$2,000, both internationally and indeed within Australia right now. Why the Australian taxpayer should pay more than 250 per cent above the odds is beyond me.

So why is it so much more expensive? Well, it comes down to the inefficient design of the network architecture. Within the NBN, there are in effect three fibres for every home. One could argue 'do it once, do it right' and the cost of the extra fibre is insignificant in the scheme of things. However, the cost to physically install, terminate and

manage the fibre is the expensive part. It would appear there is a basic misunderstanding of access network design and the fundamental physics of the transmission of data using fibre. Today we can already transmit 10 gigabits per second on a single fibre, with 40 and 100 gigabits per second coming soon.

So why do we need to have three fibres for every home, with two of those fibres completely redundant? Senator Conroy says that there has been an ACCC analysis carried out on the NBN and that that is enough to argue the government's case. But this wasn't a cost-benefit analysis and didn't consider alternative solutions. Like the government's climate change committee or 'committee for predetermined outcomes', this analysis was simply advice on how the government could implement a policy it had already decided upon. This advice was deliberately limited. The shadow minister for communications and broadband has introduced a bill in this place to ensure that the NBN faces rigorous scrutiny. The National Broadband Network Financial Transparency Bill will refer the NBN to the Productivity Commission and bring the government to account over this \$43 billion black hole.

The production and publication of a detailed 10-year business plan including key financial and operational indicators will force a true and transparent analysis of the project, expose its economic and technological deficiency and also ask a crucial question that Labor has yet to ask of the NBN: 'Is this the most cost-effective way of providing all Australians with fast broadband?'

This analysis will not delay the NBN roll-out and will provide advice that makes the network more efficient and more cost effective. Throwing away money on this network will not, as the government say, foster a 'modern and more competitive economy', rather it will grow our national stimulus debt

exponentially and will ensure generations to come are burdened by repayments on this fibre dinosaur. This government have wasted our money in the past and, if we let them, they will do it again.

You would hope, given the massive cost to the taxpayer, that as much of the technology would be sourced inside Australia to retain as much of the \$43 billion as possible. We were promised the NBN would create tens of thousands of new jobs in Australia. The Treasurer last week in question time said:

Building the National Broadband Network will create something like 25,000 jobs per year.

The Minister for Infrastructure and Transport said of the NBN:

It will drive job creation—the jobs of the new century, the jobs of the future.

Both obviously neglected to inform themselves of the facts. A number of media outlets have highlighted Australian companies which have been sidelined in their dealings with NBN Co. Their preference to deal with international organisations has already cost Australian jobs. The fibre-optic cable proposed to be used in the network is to be sourced from Corning, meaning it will be manufactured predominantly in Mexico. Why use a technology which is designed and manufactured overseas when there are Australian manufacturers of fibre-optic cable, which are both better designed and cheaper?

The decision to go to Alcatel for the gigabit passive optical network directly cost 50 jobs at NEC, who were designing their solution here in Australia for the global market. The operational support systems/business support systems solution vendor, while still to be decided, is most likely to go to an overseas organisation to the detriment of local company, Clarity. This firm already has their solution installed in a number of carriers within Australia, and they are winning bids overseas. A decision such as this could mean

Clarity pack up in Australia and head off overseas.

Members of the Gillard government continually rise in this place to lambaste the opposition as critics of fast broadband infrastructure and information technology. Nothing could be further from the truth. The coalition understand that in an information age access to efficient communications services is vital to improve the provision of health, education, social inclusion and economic developments. We are proponents of a network that can be adapted and upgraded as technologies improve.

One size does not fit all. Using fibre as the solution for all Australian households—inner city, regional and rural—does not provide the most economical and efficient solution to the problem. Funding a project without a business plan and cost-benefit analysis is poor business practice and an irresponsible allocation of taxpayer funds. The coalition supports fibre as the backbone of any broadband project but fibre is not the magic elixir to solve all our communication problems. Again, the government flaunts its \$43 billion fibre solution as the only solution that every Australian wants.

But we must accept that Australians are taking up wireless broadband at a rate that far outstrips fixed-line broadband, which is now fairly static. Consumers are sending the government clear messages, but they are being ignored at every turn. In this light it is difficult to see a business case for the NBN. Not only is the project financially irresponsible it creates risk around competition and efficiency in the telecommunications market.

I call on my coalition colleagues, government and crossbench members to support this private member's bill and motion in both houses so as to hold to account Australia's biggest ever infrastructure project. This is clearly a policy that needs to be fixed. It is

far too important to be left in the hands of incompetent bureaucrats and government ministers, especially those of the Rudd-Gillard government infamy.

**Mr FITZGIBBON** (Hunter) (4.42 pm)—I begin my contribution by acknowledging the contributions of the members for Greenway and Braddon. They spoke with such passion in this debate, which should not be surprising to any of us, because the member for Greenway and the member for Braddon represent people for whom this debate is of critical importance.

This is the equivalent of earlier debates about sewerage. I remember my father, quite infamously, declaring in this place—maybe in his maiden speech—that he would be happy to leave this place known as the guy that gave his people the right to pull the chain. I think that some people at the time found that pretty humorous. But it was true when he was elected and it was still true when I was elected that people in my electorate did not have the right to pull the chain. I am sure that is true also of the member for Braddon's people and no doubt at some point, maybe earlier, was true of the people who lived in the member for Greenway's electorate.

We contrast that with some of those who sit on the other side. The member for Greenway made the point that the member for Bradfield, who is railing so hard, has people in his electorate who have access to the best internet speeds in the country. So why could they be expected to understand that the people we represent need this technology? We do not have the privilege of always having it now, unlike those he represents. To be empowered, to keep apace, to come properly into the 21st century and to be competitive in the 21st century is absolutely crucial for the children of the people we represent in electorates like mine and in the

electorates of the member for Greenway and the member for Braddon and many others on this side.

The first question here is: why are those opposite opposing the National Broadband Network? I think we have partly answered it, although it remains absolutely inexplicable why the member for Cowper would come into this place and so enthusiastically argue that his people, the people who live in Coffs Harbour and surrounds, should not have access to the best broadband speeds available. He should come back in here and explain himself.

On the question of why those opposite are opposing this: is it because it is not needed? I think we have covered that. Of course all Australians should have the right to access the best technology available and to be internationally competitive? Is it because it is old technology? Of course it is not. Is it because the country cannot afford it—a trillion dollar economy? Of course that is nonsense. Is it because consumers do not want it? I should think not. Is it anticompetitive? No, it is just the opposite. This is transforming what is almost a monopoly telecommunications industry into a competitive one for the first time in the history of this nation. The really sad thing about this debate is that those opposite oppose this idea because it is not theirs. They oppose this very constructive and forward-looking idea because it is not theirs. No other possible explanation can be found.

I have spoken about electorates. I am very glad the member for Cunningham has joined me, because she can relate to this very well. People in my electorate want the National Broadband Network. There can be no mistake about that. The debate in my electorate, and indeed in the Hunter region, is about how quickly we will have the National Broadband Network rolled out to us. We are

in there fighting. We are in there saying, 'The regions should be done first.' Those closest to the city have an advantage already. Why not bring competitiveness to the regions by looking at us first? Indeed the Hunter chapter of Regional Development Australia has applied for a grant from the Commonwealth government in order to appoint a person to work full time for six months to look at what we in the Hunter can do to ensure that we are rolled out earlier rather than later. James Vidler, an academic from the University of Newcastle, is doing a fantastic job building the case. He is not just talking about the benefits that will roll out to consumers, because it is true that every consumer across the country will receive the same benefit. He is talking about us as a region with the capacity to provide the necessary skills to roll out the cables and do that other work, about selling our capacity to do this thing without putting pressure on either the local economy or the national economy.

While those opposite, at least in the case of those who do not have electorates like the member for Bradfield, are sitting there arguing why their people should be denied 100 megabits per second, those of us on this side, for example, from the Hunter—the member for Newcastle, the member for Shortland and the member for Charlton are joining with me—will be having a planning meeting next week for all the members from the Hunter region—all the Labor members, that is. The member for Paterson, unsurprisingly, has not shown much interest. He still believes that Hunter residents should cop second-rate wireless technology instead. We know for a fact that, if you want 50 megabits per second or more, it must be delivered by fibre-optic cable. So we are having a meeting next week to talk more about where we are and how we are going to build our case to be earlier rather than later in the rollout of the NBN.

Again, it is inexplicable that the member for Cowper and others who sit on that side of the House would be in here arguing that we should be rejecting the NBN proposal. I know that the opposition are trying to say: 'We're not necessarily against it. We think it's alright. It's just that, you know, we haven't really had a proper cost-benefit analysis.' The member for Greenway very cleverly waded around their policy of five or six pages, which I found pretty extraordinary. I like the way that the member for Windsor put it on *AM*, I think, on Monday morning when he talked about projects like the Snowy River scheme and the Sydney Harbour Bridge.

If cost-benefit analyses had been done on those projects, there is no doubt in my mind that they would not have stacked up. Every time I drive up and down the F3 freeway between Sydney and my home in the Hunter, I am constantly reminded of the mistake made when the bulk of that freeway was not made six lanes. Of course, the people who designed and constructed that highway would not have envisaged, or even dreamed, that four lanes would not be sufficient to carry traffic between Newcastle and the Hunter and beyond. In the same way that the member for Greenway pointed out that Jefferson and others could not have dreamed of what we would be doing with technology today I cannot even dream about what I or my teenage children will be doing with technology in 10, 20 or 30 years time.

There is no doubt that, for a while, they would have thought of making the F3 freeway six lanes. I have not checked that but I am sure that would be the case. There would have been a debate and someone would no doubt have come to the conclusion that six lanes was too expensive and that, on a cost-benefit analysis, it simply did not stack up. We have to ask ourselves now what the economic cost is on a daily basis of the traffic

jams and accidents caused by the decision to go with four lanes rather than six. I am not criticising those who planned or made those decisions, but it is a perfect analogy. It is an example of how wrong we can get it if we rely only on a limited time basis, cost-benefit analysis.

I ask those on the other side to reflect on that and to think about the benefits that will flow from the NBN that cannot even be measured in a cost-benefit analysis. How do you measure a grade 6 kid who is performing but who would have been underperforming if it were not for the assistance delivered to him by the National Broadband Network? How do you measure the additional happiness, if you like, of someone in an aged-care home who has a sense of security brought by having telemedicine access in her small unit? These things cannot be measured. I say to those opposite: get out of the way and let the government proceed with what is one of the most important investments— (*Time expired*)

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)**—Order! The discussion is now concluded.

## MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

### Superannuation

**Mr SHORTEN** (Maribyrnong—Assistant Treasurer and Minister for Financial Services and Superannuation) (4.52 pm)—by leave—The Gillard government is committed to boosting the retirement savings of all Australians through reforms to Australia's superannuation system. The government is committed to boosting the national savings of Australia through reforms to our superannuation system. The primary aim of superannuation is to help provide a means by which Australians can save for a dignified and comfortable retirement. Superannuation also has very positive impacts on the economy through increasing Australia's national sav-

ings and reducing our reliance on foreign borrowing.

Australia has a three-pillar approach to retirement income. This approach ensures that retirement income policy is sustainable as our population ages. The three pillars are: voluntary superannuation and other private savings; compulsory superannuation savings through the superannuation guarantee (SG) system, complemented by concessional tax treatment; and a means tested taxpayer funded aged pension. Compulsory superannuation savings through the SG system in particular focuses on adequate retirement income.

The Gillard government plans to build national savings through our superannuation reforms. Australians today have over \$1.2 trillion in superannuation savings. That is roughly the same size as our GDP. Australia's total superannuation savings are estimated to increase to \$6.1 trillion by 2035—including \$500 billion from the government's superannuation reforms. These reforms will assist in building a stronger, broader and more competitive economy.

At the time of the super guarantee system's 1992 introduction, it was expected that the provision of wage increases through superannuation would provide significant benefits to employers, as well as employees. Employers would not incur the additional on-costs associated with a direct wage increase, such as workers compensation and payroll tax. At this point I want to pay tribute to former Prime Minister Paul Keating and former ACTU Secretary Bill Kelty for their foresight two and a bit decades ago to promote these issues. The grand bargain they helped deliver both between and for Australian workers, employers and taxpayers holds up as a powerful economic lesson for us today.

Between 1 July 1992 and 30 June 2003, when the superannuation guarantee was lifted to nine per cent, the Australian economy grew strongly. GDP growth averaged 3.9 per cent per annum. Unemployment fell from 11 to 6.1 per cent. Labour productivity grew very strongly, well above its 30-year average, at 2.2 per cent per annum. Unit labour costs fell over the period by 4.5 per cent. Real wages grew. Australian business profitability grew by 6.1 per cent per annum and profits rose as a percentage of the GDP. This is a strong record. And it is now time to reconstruct a broad consensus and write the next chapter on superannuation.

The government's long-term superannuation reforms, announced on 2 May 2010, will deliver substantial improvements in retirement savings and a fairer distribution of superannuation tax concessions, ensuring more Australians can enjoy a comfortable and secure retirement. The reforms included changes to the SG arrangements, a government contribution to assist low-income earners and changes to superannuation caps to assist employees who are nearing retirement.

The Gillard government is increasing the superannuation guarantee rate from nine to 12 per cent to address issues raised by our ageing population and to boost private and national savings. This represents a major new investment in the long-term adequacy of Australian retirement savings. The government will also extend the SG arrangement to workers aged between 70 and 74, to apply from 1 July 2013. This measure will particularly assist older workers who perhaps missed out on superannuation during the earlier years of their working lives.

From 1 July 2012, the government is introducing an annual government contribution of up to \$500 which will effectively return the tax payable on compulsory superannuation contributions made by or for workers on

incomes up to \$37,000 a year. This measure will provide a fairer distribution of superannuation tax concessions, as these employees do not currently receive tax incentives for saving through super.

From 1 July 2012, individuals aged over 50 with superannuation balances below \$500,000 will be able to make up to \$50,000 in concessional superannuation contributions annually. This doubles the cap of \$25,000, which was scheduled to apply from 1 July 2012, and will allow these individuals to 'catch up' on their superannuation contributions when most able.

As a result of these reforms, approximately 8.4 million Australians will receive an increase in their retirement incomes, including 3.5 million Australians on lower incomes who do not receive tax incentives for saving through superannuation and older workers catching up on their retirement savings. For example, an employee now aged 30 on average full-time wages can expect to have an additional \$108,000 in superannuation at retirement. Another example: a female aged 30 today on average full-time weekly earnings, but with an interrupted work pattern, can still expect to retire with an additional \$78,000 in superannuation.

Under the Fairer, Simpler Superannuation package, the government announced it will introduce a new low-cost, simple product called MySuper from 1 July 2013. The introduction of MySuper forms the first part of the government's response to the Super System Review (also known as the Cooper review) into our superannuation system. MySuper is designed to provide a simple, low-cost fund that has no unnecessary fees or charges and simple features that will make it easier to compare fund performance. It will replace existing default funds. Only those funds whose default product meets MySuper

standards will be able to operate as a default fund.

Labor will introduce new standards that providers of MySuper products must meet, including:

- No entry fees, with exit fees limited to cost recovery.
- A ban on commissions and conflicted remuneration structures in relation to retail distribution and advice in line with the government's financial advice reforms.
- New duties will require super fund providers to deliver value for money or be stripped of their licence by the regulator.
- A single, simple and easy-to-understand investment option designed to maximise a person's retirement income.
- Standardised reporting requirements in plain English.

MySuper funds will be licensed by APRA, who will also monitor and publish MySuper fund investment returns and costs to ensure members are getting value for money. Anyone making contributions to super will be able to open a MySuper account.

The government also proposes to work with consumers, the superannuation industry and employers to modernise and streamline the administration of the superannuation system. An important first step in this process is the better use of tax file numbers to identify and consolidate member superannuation accounts, including lost accounts. An individual's tax file number will be the primary identifier of member accounts, subject to strict conditions to ensure privacy and security of information.

The use of tax file numbers as primary account identifiers will commence from 1 July 2011. Superannuation funds will be able to offer MySuper products from 1 July 2013. Transfer to an account with the lower fees

expected from the MySuper and SuperStream proposals is projected to increase the retirement benefit of a worker, now aged 30 and earning full-time average wages, by more than \$40,000 by the time they retire.

The final report of the Cooper review was released on 5 July 2010 and outlines 177 recommendations, including the MySuper and SuperStream proposals, which I have outlined. We will respond to the remainder of the review's recommendations by the end of 2010.

With regard to the government's proposed SG changes, the superannuation industry, the wider financial services industry and employee representative bodies have all indicated their broad support for the proposed SG increase. And here I would also like to acknowledge the work of my predecessors in the superannuation portfolio—Chris Bowen and Nick Sherry.

In delivering this ministerial statement in this place I want to be clear that the time for a new consensus on super has arrived. My objective is not to be political—indeed we need to remove politics from superannuation.

**Mr Anthony Smith**—Why are you smiling at me?

**Mr SHORTEN**—Because I like the member for Casey. But it cannot be left unsaid that the federal opposition has—at least to date—expressed an unwillingness to support the government in this place in delivering the reforms I have outlined. They simply seem to ignore the tide of demographic trend sweeping towards us. In simple terms we face a situation where the number of retirees will grow faster than the number of workers. Yet up until this point the opposition has regrettably consistently chosen to oppose what I have outlined today despite modelling by the Treasury showing that the government's superannuation reforms will save Australian

taxpayers \$42 billion over 25 years in lower pension outlays.

The introduction and implementation of the Gillard government's superannuation reforms build upon and enhance Australia's already robust retirement income system. Our changes will facilitate a dignified and an adequate retirement for millions of Australian workers, and they will help build our country and our economy as we go about securing the next wave of prosperity. Our reforms are the right answer to the challenges before us.

My profound hope is that members opposite will soon join the new consensus, put down the instruments of political noise and join the chorus. Let us seize this opportunity to deliver for future retirees, our children and our grandchildren. Seize the opportunity for sound reform and deliver for Australia's future. I commend this statement to the House. I seek leave of the House to move a motion to enable the member for Casey to speak for 9½ minutes.

Leave granted.

**Mr SHORTEN**—by leave—I move:

That so much of the standing and sessional orders be suspended as would prevent Mr ADH Smith speaking in reply to the ministerial statement for a period not exceeding nine and a half minutes.

Question agreed to.

**Mr ANTHONY SMITH** (Casey) (5.02 pm)—Thank you Madam Acting Deputy Speaker. The minister's statement today was interesting for what it said and for what it did not say. He made a number of points about Australia's superannuation system. He said, amongst other things, that it was important to boost national savings and I must begin this contribution by pointing out that of course the coalition agrees that boosting savings is a critical economic objective. He managed to mention that in his speech without any refer-

ence whatsoever to this government's dismal record on national savings with respect to its continued debt-fuelled and wasteful spending.

He also said that the period between 1 July 1992 and 30 June 2003 was a very good period for the economy. In fact he read out a number of key statistics and at the end said that this is a strong record. We welcome the fact that he acknowledges the performance of the Howard-Costello government in delivering economic reforms. We do not remember—I can be forgetful but the shadow finance minister will correct me—any great consensus on tax reform through 1998, but we do thank the minister for acknowledging that the tough and difficult economic decisions taken between 1996 and 2003 did play a huge role in delivering the outcomes that he mentions, and he rightly points out the strong economic record of that period.

The minister spoke almost in homily terms about his approach to super in the future. Lets us go back and see the value of Labor's words. Twelve days before the 2007 election—the Assistant Treasurer would remember these words—the then Prime Minister, Mr Rudd, said there would be no change to superannuation laws, 'not one jot, not one tittle'. From that period on, in nearly three years Labor has halved the concessional contribution caps, penalising thousands of Australians who inadvertently exceeded them, and undermined Australians' incentive to save. Labor cut back co-contribution payments, discouraging low-income earners from saving, and it mandated that industry funds be the default superannuation fund for the bulk of modern awards, curtailing competition amongst funds; it promised to tender the role of the Superannuation Clearing House to the private sector but instead gave the contract to Medicare.

It is crystal clear that Labor's track record from the moment of time it broke its promise not to alter superannuation and the changes that have followed, its chaotic approach since 2007 has damaged confidence in the system. Voluntary contributions have slowed to a trickle. They are not moving forward. Voluntary contributions have dried up because of the damage the government has done over the last three years.

A key aspect of the minister's speech and the government's policy now is to lift the SGC levy from nine per cent to 12 per cent. He would agree—we do agree on some things—that was the bulk of his speech. That is what we would agree on. He talked about the great consensus that he wanted to build. He said that so far we on this side of the House have disappointed him because we have not joined his great consensus.

As I said at the outset, his speech was interesting both for what it said and what it did not say. Whilst he talked at length on this subject, he did not mention the recommendation of the Henry review. He did not even mention Ken Henry. The word 'Henry' was not mentioned in 9½ minutes—not one mention. The poetic bit at the end would have been added, we know, by someone in the minister's office. Whilst the Treasury have great skills, we do not suspect that was from them. But I bet the draft had something in it about Henry.

Let us go to the facts of the matter. The Henry review, unlike the minister and unlike the Labor government, looked at this issue, amongst others, for 18 months. After 18 months of modelling and careful consideration, here is what they said:

The retirement income report recommended that the superannuation guarantee rate remain at 9 per cent. In coming to this recommendation the Review took into the account the effect that the superannuation guarantee has on the pre-retirement income of low-income earners. Although employ-

ers are required to make superannuation guarantee contributions, employees bear the cost of these contributions through lower wage growth. This means the increase in the employee's retirement income is achieved by reducing their standard of living before retirement.

That was the considered view of Ken Henry after 18 months of consideration of modelling and information. We can see why this government will not release the key documents and the modelling associated with the Henry review. That is the first point.

The second point, Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, is that, whilst the government received this review, considered it and announced a totally opposite position, they have not explained why they think Ken Henry is wrong—why they think those on the Henry review, in their view, have got this so wrong. At no point have they put forward information to demonstrate that the policy they have come up with will damage low-income earners, but that is precisely what the Henry review points out in great detail.

In the time remaining, let me also point out on behalf of my colleague in the other place—Senator Cormann, the shadow Assistant Treasurer—that another key area the minister has shied away from is the important area of competition amongst superannuation funds that are identified as default funds under modern awards. Throughout 2008-09, the AIRC and now Fair Work Australia have selected default funds in modern awards and have done so without any criteria or transparency or capacity for review. There is a significant bias towards industry. No retail funds are prescribed in the most widely applied modern awards. They are biased towards industry union superannuation funds. When this process began—and the minister might groan—the minister's predecessor, Senator Nick Sherry, to whom the minister paid tribute, wrote to the AIRC asking the commission to implement objective criteria.

They declined the request and this government has simply sat back and weakly accepted it.

Madam Acting Deputy Speaker, with respect to the Cooper review, we have said in our election policy and since that we recognise there is merit in many of the recommendations. There will be much that we will be able to support. Interestingly, the minister's statement was silent on how the government will fix conflicts of interest and the issues in super caused by poor governance, for example reforms on mandatory disclosure and the like. He did point out that he was going to respond to the Cooper review before the end of the year.

That brings back memories for the shadow finance minister and me, because the Henry review was going to be released before the end of the year and it was going to be responded to by February—and then nothing happened until a few days before the budget. We have no faith in this government. With respect to My Super, we have previously outlined our views. Low-fee products do exist and we are very concerned that My Super encourages a pay in, leave and forget attitude to superannuation. (*Time expired*)

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)**—The discussion is now concluded. And just for the edification of the member for Casey: whilst there is only one Deputy Speaker, everybody in the chair is under licence from the Speaker and there is no need to use the word 'acting'. I encourage everybody to use the honorific 'Deputy Speaker', whether with 'Madam' or 'Mr'. It is much easier. We are all deputy speakers. I thank the member.

**Mr Anthony Smith**—Obviously the change has confused me.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER**—This is for everybody. Anybody who is in the chair is

the Deputy Speaker. There is no need to use the word ‘acting’.

**COMMITTEES**

**Membership**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)**—I have received messages from the Senate acquainting the House of the appointment of senators to certain joint committees. Copies of the messages are on the chamber table and details will be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings*.

**SUPERANNUATION LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT BILL 2010**

**INTERNATIONAL TAX AGREEMENTS  
AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2) 2010**

**PROTECTION OF THE SEA  
LEGISLATION AMENDMENT  
BILL 2010**

**Returned from the Senate**

Message received from the Senate returning the bills without amendment or request.

**NATIONAL MEASUREMENT  
AMENDMENT BILL 2010**

**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.

**SERVICE AND EXECUTION OF  
PROCESS AMENDMENT  
(INTERSTATE FINE ENFORCEMENT)  
BILL 2010**

**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.

**WATER EFFICIENCY LABELLING  
AND STANDARDS AMENDMENT  
BILL 2010**

**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.

**CONDOLENCES**

**Hon. Kenneth Shaw Wriedt**

**Report from Main Committee**

Order of the day returned from Main Committee for further consideration; certified copy of the motion presented.

Ordered that the order of the day be considered immediately.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)**—The question is that the motion be agreed to. I ask all honourable members to signify their approval by rising in their places.

Question agreed to, honourable members standing in their places.

**CORPORATIONS AMENDMENT (No. 1)  
BILL 2010**

**Report from Main Committee**

Bill returned from Main Committee for further consideration; certified copy presented.

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

**Second Reading**

Debate resumed.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms AE Burke)**—The question is that this bill be now read a second time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

**Third Reading**

**Mr GRAY** (Brand—Special Minister of State and Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity) (5.16 pm)—by leave—I move:

That this bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

**DEFENCE LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT (SECURITY OF  
DEFENCE PREMISES) BILL 2010**

**Report from Main Committee**

Bill returned from Main Committee without amendment; certified copy of the bill presented.

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Bill agreed to.

**Third Reading**

**Mr GRAY** (Brand—Special Minister of State and Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity) (5.17 pm)—by leave—I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

**FISHERIES LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT BILL (No. 2) 2010**

**Report from Main Committee**

Bill returned from Main Committee without amendment; certified copy of the bill presented.

Ordered that this bill be considered immediately.

Bill agreed to.

**Third Reading**

**Mr GRAY** (Brand—Special Minister of State and Special Minister of State for the Public Service and Integrity) (5.18 pm)—by leave—I move:

That the bill be now read a third time.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a third time.

**GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S SPEECH****Address-in-Reply**

Debate resumed from 25 October, on the proposed address-in-reply to the speech of Her Excellency the Governor-General—

May it please Your Excellency:

We, the House of Representatives of the Commonwealth of Australia, in Parliament assembled, express our loyalty to the Sovereign, and thank Your Excellency for the speech which you have been pleased to address to the Parliament—

on motion by **Ms O'Neill**:

That the Address be agreed to.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! Before I call the member for Aston, I remind honourable members that this is his first speech. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies be extended to him.

**Mr TUDGE** (Aston) (5.19 pm)—Mr Speaker, I rise to give my first speech in this House and am honoured to do so as the representative of the people of Aston. I come here as the custodian of their interests in this parliament and commit to working for their benefit. In coming to this parliament, I follow in the footsteps of two great former representatives of Aston—the late Mr Peter Nugent and the Hon. Chris Pearce.

Peter Nugent brought to the parliament a commonsense approach to the environment and a belief in technology as the foundation for our future. But the respect and praise from both sides of parliament on his sudden death in 2001 was for his championship of those less fortunate, including Indigenous Australians.

Chris Pearce was a businessman and local councillor who had a passionate belief in the value of policies which strengthened the community and family, and a desire to see

music and the arts better incorporated in the curriculum. He achieved much of his agenda, and Australia and Aston are better for it.

The changes these men wrought in this place, and in themselves, were the end results of the vast opportunities membership of a parliament brings. This is its strength and power if you are willing to embrace and run with it. I want to take all the opportunities presented to me in this place. I want to put my 15 years experience in business, in government and in the community sector to the best use I can. I want not only to be a great representative for the individual families and businesses in my electorate but also to make a national contribution to keep our society open and free, to minimise the role of government in our daily lives and to provide real choice and opportunity for all Australians.

The seat of Aston, in outer eastern Melbourne, is named after Matilda Aston, otherwise known as Tilly—a remarkable woman ahead of her time. Born in 1873, she was totally blind by the age of 7 at a time when, as she described it, blind people were often kept like ‘birds in a cage’. She helped bring about great changes to provide freedom and opportunities for visually impaired people, often overcoming intolerance and downright prejudice to achieve her ends. Her example has been honoured by the previous two members. It is a legacy I will strive to continue in the years ahead.

The electorate itself also lives up to the example she set throughout her whole life: hard work, participation, humour, strength of character and care for others. All of these attributes are seen each day amongst the people of Aston. It is middle Australia, full of everyday heroes and untold acts of goodness. It is about real people, such as Colin Golding, who has given 40 years of service by rescuing people and property with the Rowville CFA. It is about Lawrence Turnbull and

his parishioners at the Highway Parish in Vermont South and Wantirna, who provide guidance and support for each other, including my own family—as do the other churches throughout the community. And it is about the hundreds of people within the Knox Football Club community who have rallied behind one of their players, Damon Fent, who was recently made a paraplegic in a tragic accident.

Volunteers who work in op shops, people who deliver meals on wheels, drivers who support the work of the Red Cross and the Salvos, organisers of the scouts and the sporting teams—this sense of community in Aston is more than worthy of support and must be preserved. The people of Aston respect the need for taxes but they expect value for money. They expect government to alleviate the cost of living pressures, not add to them. And from running their own businesses and household budgets, they know that governments cannot go on borrowing \$100 million per day.

With the third-highest proportion of homeowners in the country, Aston residents need interest rates to be low. With crime rates rising, they want community safety to be treated as a top priority by government, with more police on the streets and security cameras in local hotspots. They have a right to basic services. That is what government is meant to do. Then they want to make their own decisions free from interference.

Aston shares a problem with many outer suburban areas: the issue of congestion, which impinges on quality of life. The journey from Vermont South to work in the city used to be a simple 30-minute drive; today, it takes an hour or more, assuming you leave very early. You simply multiply the chaos the further you stretch out along and from Burwood Highway. Congestion is crushing the fundamental choices of where to work and

study. We may be getting wealthier but if our choices are diminishing we are lesser for it.

Rapid population growth is a key driver of congestion. As the son of immigrants, I proudly support immigration but our population is growing too quickly. Our population increase last year was twice that of five years ago. The Treasury advice to the government is that high population growth need not impact on the liveability of our cities, provided: ... the right plans and policies are put in place now in anticipation of it.

I see no such plans in place for the outer east of Melbourne. The people of Aston have plans and ideas to ease congestion, and I fully support them and will fight for: a rail link to Rowville would take the equivalent of a lane of traffic off the Monash Freeway and link up to Australia's largest university; the extension of Dorset Road and the duplication of the remaining section of High Street Road; the tram line extended to Knox; the Eastern Freeway connected to the Tullamarine to ease the Hoddle Street bottleneck; and getting rid of the dangerous Stud Road bus lane—all of these infrastructure projects should be prioritised ahead of spending \$43 billion on fibre to every home or billions on pink batts. One thing I will strongly stand up against in this place, as a supposed panacea to the issue of congestion, is the government's consideration of road congestion taxes. In the absence of viable alternatives to our major roads, this will be an outrageous impost on people in the suburbs and will further limit their choices and opportunities.

Economic growth is the foundation on which all else is built. It is important not just because it creates wealth and funds the services that the community wants and expects but because it is about jobs. Participation in the workforce provides for a family, keeps people out of poverty and empowers people to take charge of their lives. If there is one

overarching goal for this national parliament, it is to keep unemployment low. While the official unemployment figure is low compared with other nations, there are still tens of thousands of people looking for work.

There are 750,000 people on disability support pensions, of whom at least 150,000 are capable of working, according to the Brotherhood of St Laurence. The barriers which prevent these people accessing the workforce should be identified and removed. Flexible labour markets decided between workers and employers would better meet the needs of both able and disabled people, and they would underpin the real engines of growth—productivity and participation.

This government has a tendency for thinking that a tax is the answer to every problem. The climate is changing, so it says we need a carbon tax. There is a problem with binge drinking, so it implements an alcopops tax. There is a mining boom, so it proposes an extra mining tax. And there is a congestion problem, so apparently we need a road tax. None of these taxes will solve the problems that the government has defined, but all of them will increase the cost of living for Aston residents and for ordinary Australians, add extra burdens upon businesses and increase the size of governments. By association, these taxes will hurt the job market and cripple business incentive.

My parents and in-laws are small business owners. I have run my own small business. I understand the risks that people take, frequently putting their own homes on the line. I am an unflinching supporter of small business, including the 11,000 in Aston. I believe that people should be rewarded for their effort through lower taxes and that people should be able to get on with the job as free as possible from government interference.

My upbringing is similar to millions who have come before me. I was born to newly

arrived immigrants—10-pound Poms—who set up on the very outskirts of Melbourne in Pakenham, the last stop on the train line. While my family did not stay as a unit for very long, the abiding commitment of both my mum and my dad was to a good education. I did not appreciate it at the time, but through my school education I was given the skills, confidence and values that laid the foundation for future opportunities.

My desire is for every Australian student to have the same schooling opportunities that I did. Our schools perform well by international standards, but there is more to be done. We must constantly be improving standards. We should unashamedly promote excellence, including the establishment of more select-entry government schools. But, equally, we must ensure that every school in the most disadvantaged area is a school which enables students to soar to reach their potential.

In our great egalitarian society our schools should be the ultimate hand-up, where it does not matter where you start or where you live, it is what happens in the classroom that counts. We have yet to reach this goal and we will fail to do so if stifling bureaucracy limits the ability of principals to run schools according to their professional judgment. We will fail to do so if educational fads trump evidence-based practices in teaching children how to read and do maths. And we will fail to do so if unions continue to see teachers as part of an industrial power play, rather than as professionals whose influence over our children is second only to parents.

For over a decade I have been involved with school reform initiatives, working with Brendan Nelson when he was education minister, with the Cape York Institute for Policy and Leadership and through non-profit initiatives. My assessment is that the key reform to improving our schools is lifting the quality

and standing of our teachers. Research shows that a student can perform at twice the rate of learning under a good teacher than under an average one.

I am proud to have helped establish the Teach for Australia initiative that aims to lift the standing of teaching through tapping into a different pool of graduates. I am pleased there is bipartisan support for it. I support initiatives for mid-career professionals to be accelerated into teaching in a similar way. However, we must just go further and rigorously assess the quality of the teaching courses at our universities. We should set higher minimum standards for entry into those courses, even if in the short term this means a smaller intake. We should provide greater incentives for the best teachers to teach in areas where kids need an extra hand-up. Importantly, principals should be fully empowered to move teachers on if they are not performing up to scratch.

During this parliamentary term, the next four-year funding agreement will be negotiated to cover the 2013-16 period. I will be monitoring this closely to ensure the best standards are provided for children in state schools and that parents who make tremendous sacrifices to send their children to Catholic or independent schools are not penalised for doing so.

We have many national environmental issues to address—feral animals, soil erosion, water security and air pollution to name a few. There are also practical things that we can do locally in Aston such as stormwater harvesting for local sportsgrounds and beautifying local parks and creeks. However, while we must do more to preserve our environment, we must be equally vigilant to ensure that environmentalism does not become the politically correct ideology of the 21st century, where to scrutinise or question a green measure is considered treason or de-

nial or worse. We must also be vigilant to ensure that it does not morph into an agenda which is more about limiting growth or protectionism than it is about protecting the environment.

There are a few on the other side of this chamber who still openly admit to being socialists. But many under a green guise or under the banner of so-called nation building are advocating for the re-regulation of our economy and government intrusion into areas which are the proper role of private enterprise. Every green measure should be examined closely for its efficacy. This government wasted billions on pink batts and green loans. Land rights have been taken from Indigenous Australians under the cloak of environmentalism, despite Indigenous people being sound stewards of the land for tens of thousands of years. Communities are sometimes destroyed by the introduction of wind farms, which barely put a dent in our dependence on fossil fuels. Most tragically, internationally, biofuels are being planted instead of food, contributing to a global food shortage. The environment is important and so is humanity. Let us use our brains. Let us build up our natural capital. But let us make sure that every dollar spent delivers maximum benefit and that we are explicit about trade-offs while doing it.

In coming to the end of my speech tonight, I would like to touch on a topic that I am deeply committed to, a commitment I share with many here—that is, the plight of Indigenous Australians. It is hard to believe that in modern Australia a group of us still live in circumstances that, on almost every measure, are unacceptable. The broad statistics are familiar to us. The issues seem so intractable. But if we come to this parliament with the aim of doing good work for our fellow country men and women, and particularly for those less fortunate, then we must

surely keep the plight of Indigenous Australians high on our agenda.

My views in this area are informed by my experience working as the Deputy Director of the Cape York Institute. They are influenced by my former boss, Noel Pearson, whom I regard as one of Australia's greatest intellects. I look forward to working with my new colleague Ken Wyatt and learning from his experience.

I believe that if we are to make substantial progress then we must have sharp clarity around the proposition that no group of people can prosper unless they are an integral part of the real economy. In the modern globalised world, economic and social development in any community requires successful basic education and social norms in relation to work. This is not an assertion based on ideology; it is an empirical fact.

We do no favours to any group of people, not least our most disadvantaged citizens, if we believe that normal schooling and normal jobs are somehow less relevant by virtue of one's location or culture. I believe we need a more urgent and ambitious agenda in these two areas. We need achievable targets for this term of parliament, not just targets to halve the gap in a decade or more. That is a recipe for inaction.

There are four actions that I put forward. First, full school enrolment should be enforced under the law. It should be put on the next COAG agenda. There are no excuses for delay. Second, we should aim to achieve mainstream school attendance levels within this term of parliament. We should use every lever at our disposal to achieve this, including enforcing attendance laws, linking welfare to school attendance and funding case managers to support parents taking responsibility. Third, there should be a focus on reforming schools in remote areas to ensure mainstream quality. And if the poison of

grog impedes progress then there should be a redoubling of our efforts against alcohol availability and use. Finally, in employment we should acknowledge that in many remote communities there will never be sufficient jobs. We must change the incentives so that able-bodied people, in particular school leavers, are strongly encouraged to be mobile and find employment regardless of where those jobs are located. It is ridiculous that we have jobs going begging, yet have thousands of people sitting, and becoming debilitated, on welfare.

I do not pretend that my proposals are easy or comprehensive; nor do they contradict or negate legitimate aspirations for additional rights, cultural maintenance or symbolic reconciliation. But until we banish Indigenous relativism and have mainstream aspirations for Indigenous schooling and employment then I fear our progress will be tragically slow. Long term, Australia will be the loser.

No-one comes to this parliament without the support and foundations provided by others. In my case, I bring a bedrock of values and unflinching support over many years from my parents, Doreen and Graham; their respective partners, Norm and Margaret; my brother and sister, Stephen and Shona; and my in-laws, Margaret and Dennis, and their families. I have been the beneficiary of great mentors including Colin Carter, Brendan Nelson, Jim Carlton, Alexander Downer, Bob Charles, Greg Hunt and Chris Pearce. I have had friendship, advice and support in so many ways from Richard Balderstone, Ross Fitzgerald, Yvonne Thompson, Yen Liow, Henry Jones, Catherine Murphy, Mary, DB, Jack and Darc.

Importantly, I come here as a proud member of the Liberal Party of Australia, whose values of hard work, small government and individual enterprise I share. I particularly

acknowledge the Aston chairman and his wife, Graeme and Maureen McEwin, outstanding individuals who over 20 years have now overseen the election of three Liberal members to this chamber. I also acknowledge other tireless contributors including Darren Disney, David Jancik, Michael Gilmour, Glenda and Max Frost, Perrin Brown, Ben Davies, Sandra Rae, Glynis Allan, Martin Bartlett, John Shipp and the hundreds of others who have supported our efforts. I thank you all. I would not be here without you.

To my darling wife, Teri, and our two beautiful girls, Cassie and Kristen: you are the most important people in my life. You have always been there for me, despite my absences, and I promise I will always be there for you.

This is a remarkable country. We inspire others with our sense of the possible through our world-class scientists, researchers, doctors, artists, businesspeople, designers and sportspeople. I want to be part of creating opportunities for all Australians in the generations to come—in my electorate of Aston and right across our nation. Tilly Aston's life was a vision of our better selves. In a time of limited opportunity, she created opportunity. In a time of closed doors, she opened doors. In a time of rationed generosity, she gave untold generosity. Her values are our values—of openness of opportunity, of the majestic possibility of each life. If in some small way I can embody those values then that will be enough.

**Mr VASTA (Bonner)** (5.45 pm)—If there is one thing that is more humbling than coming to this place for the first time and making a first speech, it is returning here again. It has been just over three years since I last spoke in this parliament and, Mr Deputy Speaker, I am incredibly honoured to stand before you to deliver my first speech in this

the 43rd Parliament. Most importantly, I am honoured to once again be representing the people of Bonner and I thank them most sincerely for the faith they have shown in me to be their representative, their advocate and their voice on the national scene.

As the members of this parliament are no doubt aware, the electorate of Bonner was named after a great Queenslander who also happened to be a great Liberal, former senator Neville Bonner. In 1971 Senator Bonner was the first Indigenous Australian elected to the federal parliament. During his 12 years in the Senate he was a hardworking and diligent parliamentarian, respected by both sides of politics. In his 16 years after leaving the Senate, he was a much esteemed elder statesman of Australian public life. I know that he would be immensely pleased that the Liberal Party of Australia and the parliament have now also welcomed the first Indigenous Australian to the House of Representatives, the member for Hasluck, Ken Wyatt.

I am very proud to have served as a member of the Howard government in my first term as the member for Bonner from 2004 to 2007. While I accepted the verdict of the electorate in the 2007 election when I was not re-elected, I cannot deny the incredible personal disappointment I felt at the time because of what I still wanted to contribute and deliver for the people of Bonner. I believe that the last three years have served as somewhat of a sabbatical for me from public service. I have used that opportunity to broaden my experience in the private sector and, at the same time, contemplate my future. However, over the last three years I could not help but continue my involvement with members of the community of Bonner and through those connections I maintained an ongoing dialogue with many residents. It was obvious to me during the past three years away from federal politics that my passion lies in representing and serving my

community and I sought to regain the trust of the residents of Bonner. I believe that I have continued to learn and grow during my absence from this parliament and all of those experiences will assist me to be a better and more effective representative of my community's views in Canberra.

In my first speech in 2004, I said that the electorate of Bonner was a snapshot of middle Australia. This is still true in 2010, but not because time has stood still—quite the opposite. Over the past six years, Australia has experienced enormous change, and so has the electorate of Bonner. As I look at both the statistics and the experience of residents on the ground, I continue to be amazed by the ever-changing demographic in Bonner and how this has taken place over such a relatively short period of time, creating great opportunities as well as great challenges.

Bonner represents a way of life that is attractive to young professionals, given its proximity to the Brisbane CBD. It is also attractive to a growing number of families given the exceptional standard of education facilities within the electorate that include both public and private primary and secondary schools as well as Griffith University's Mitchell campus. Bonner is also, not surprisingly, attractive to a higher than average number of retired or semiretired people, given the relaxed and tranquil paradise along the beautiful Bayside.

I am particularly mindful of the aspirations of all Queenslanders in the electorate of Bonner and not least because Queensland and Australia's economic situation was very different when I last stood in this chamber. I am very conscious of the impact of budget deficits and government debt on taxpayers in Bonner and how this has translated into cost-of-living pressures alongside higher mortgage repayments. I am committed to being part of a coalition that demands fiscal re-

straint and responsibility, and I will hold this government to account for every dollar of taxpayers' money it spends and, sadly in so many cases, wastes. This is my firm commitment to the residents of Bonner in order to ensure that their experience, their values and their aspirations are represented in Canberra.

As a changing and growing electorate, Bonner is in need of investment in new infrastructure and services. This was obvious to me during my first term, particularly in relation to health and community support. As part of that effort, I delivered a much needed Medicare office and Australian Hearing Centre in Wynnum, as well as a family relationship centre in Mount Gravatt. I was also successful in securing a commitment from the Howard government to invest \$700 million to upgrade the vital Port of Brisbane motorway, but I am disappointed that this commitment was not acted upon by the Rudd government. I want to build on this past track record in successfully delivering new services. I will continue to work throughout this term towards delivering improvements in transport and road safety, health services, communications and community support.

A key issue for local residents is the availability of access to broadband services throughout the electorate. Throughout the election campaign—and since I was elected—so many local residents have told me that they are not particularly interested in accessing superfast download speeds of 100 megabits per second being proposed under this National Broadband Network. They just want access to the current 25 gigabit per second broadband services, but to be able to do it throughout the whole of the electorate, reliably and at a reasonable price.

This issue is particularly relevant for a family that recently moved from Central Queensland to the suburb of Wakerley in my

electorate. While the move was associated with employment, this family also hoped that it would provide opportunities for them to have better access to specialists for their youngest daughter, who is autistic. While living in a remote area, this family found that access to the internet not only provided additional support networks for them but also provided their daughter with learning and development opportunities through interactive media and self-paced learning. They had access to ADSL broadband and had assumed that continuing a similar service would not be a special consideration in their move to Wakerley, which is within 20 kilometres of the Brisbane CBD. However, now living in Wakerley, this family can only access a very expensive six-gigabyte per month wireless service. Very frustratingly for many, this inner-city suburb is significantly lacking in infrastructure and is not even up to regional and remote community standards.

While this example serves to highlight the need for better broadband infrastructure, the government's NBN cannot be the answer when under this proposal local residents in Wakerley have been told that they will be waiting up to eight years to gain access to any broadband, let alone faster broadband. This is rightly unacceptable to the residents of Wakerley and other residents throughout Bonner, in particular those in Carindale, Mackenzie and the Wynnum-Manly area. I am committed to working on reducing this absurd time frame and ensuring that this investment in communications infrastructure is made as soon as possible, but also with a reasonable price tag.

I am encouraged that the Lord Mayor of Brisbane and the Brisbane City Council are working with private enterprise to offer an alternative to the government's NBN. This project is in its infancy but I am looking forward to working with the Lord Mayor, as well as Councillors Adrian Schrunner and

Krista Adams, to ensure that this exciting alternative proposal is given all the support it deserves.

When considering adequate services to my community in Bonner, health also continues to be an area of particular interest to me. During the election campaign, the government promised \$15 million for a GP superclinic in the Wynnum-Manly area. Given that this commitment was made during the election campaign to support a marginal seat, neither the community nor I are yet across the detail of the government's proposal. I believe that a process like this must be done following thorough consultation with the community involved and my constituents expect nothing less, not least those involved in all aspects of health services. It is imperative that the local community is involved and has ownership of the project to ensure that it delivers improved primary health care that utilises the wealth of expertise and knowledge in the existing infrastructure of health services. The Wynnum-Manly area is unique and therefore a unique solution is needed that will ensure no existing GPs or health providers will be adversely impacted but residents will have improved access to primary health care.

My constituents constantly remind me that this is taxpayers' money, not the government's money, and therefore the community must be involved in the process of deciding what they need. They are, of course, absolutely correct and the government should listen to and respect that view. To that end I have written to the Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon. Nicola Roxon, seeking information about the government's proposal and I look forward to working with her and my constituents during this parliament to deliver a unique solution for primary health care in Bonner.

Bonner is a growing electorate with growing needs. I mentioned previously the number of families attracted to the area because of the lifestyle offered by Brisbane's eastern suburbs. This means that education is truly on the minds of my constituents. Everyone aspires to give their children a better future in life, and there is no better way to do that than through a quality education. This is an exciting time for education in Bonner. While a number of state schools have been consolidated under the Queensland government's State Schools of Tomorrow program, the opportunity has arisen for those schools and students to move to exciting new premises that better suit their needs. The Catholic and independent school sector continues to grow and go from strength to strength in Bonner, providing local parents with plenty of choice—a principle very much supported by the Coalition.

There has been a significant amount of investment in schools in Bonner but I remain committed to ensuring that all schools receive value for money for the school halls and libraries that have been imposed on them under the Building the Education Revolution program. It pains me to see that this program has resulted in an increased divide between the government and non-government school sectors. While Catholic and independent schools have been able to manage their own projects and thus obtain great value for money, the projects at state schools have been centrally arranged by the state education bureaucracy. Sadly, all the evidence so far, both anecdotal evidence from concerned parents as well as official evidence presented to various federal and state inquires and reviews, suggests that billions of dollars have been wasted by state governments around Australia on increased costs, inflated fees and general mismanagement. The end result is that the children in state schools have by and large not received good value for

money—certainly not as good as their non-government school counterparts. This has been one of the largest infrastructure programs in Australia's history and this government has once again proved that it cannot be trusted to properly manage taxpayers' money to achieve good outcomes for everyone.

I am proud to serve in an Abbott-led coalition team and I believe Tony is a true role model of determination and strength of character for all of us. Winning the seat of Bonner was the result of team work. It is always a tremendously difficult task to single out individuals for special thanks, but I would like to acknowledge the dedicated group of supporters without whom I would not be standing in this chamber today.

Firstly, I want to thank my family. In my first speech to this parliament in 2004, I outlined my journey to becoming the first representative for the then newly created seat of Bonner. The incredible encouragement and support of my family has continued steadfast on this journey and I would not be here without them. I particularly want to thank my parents, along with my brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews and cousins. I would also like to acknowledge my grandmother for her undying love and support.

While I cannot name them all individually, I would like to thank every Liberal-National Party member in the Bonner electorate for their tireless support during what was a lengthy and onerous campaign. Each of you is a stakeholder in this victory and I am indebted to you. I will not let you down.

I would like to pay tribute to my campaign director and now office manager, Nina Schrinner, who with her husband, Councillor Adrian Schrinner, were the people in whom I placed my complete trust and who were my strength and support throughout the campaign. I also thank the core members of my

campaign team—Russ, Liam, Steve, Kev, Arthur, Saxon, Cheryl, Col, Ryan and Alana—for all your hard work and special mention must also be made of Frankie, Brett, Nathan, Ally, Mario, Warren and Neil—you guys are tremendous.

I would like to thank my parliamentary colleagues Senator Brett Mason and Senator George Brandis for their long-term support, guidance and advice without which this victory would truly not be possible—I salute you. I thank Senator Eric Abetz, Joe Hockey, Dr Sharman Stone and Peter Dutton, who made key visits and provided invaluable support to Bonner throughout the campaign period. Special mention must be made of Julie Bishop, who took time out of what was an extraordinarily busy schedule to support me in my fight to win Bonner—Julie, you are truly a wonderful person and a great asset to this team.

I thank the Queensland Liberal National State President, Bruce McIver, and the wonderful team at LNP headquarters: Michael O'Dwyer, James McGrath, James McKay, Kepa Andrews and their teams. It is testament to the LNP state organisation that this newly merged party has been successful in winning an additional nine seats in Queensland. This result makes us either the largest or equal largest state represented in the coalition party room.

**Mr Ian Macfarlane**—The largest.

**Mr VASTA**—So the largest, thank you. There are other members of this parliament that have lost their seat and have been fortunate enough to win them back, some as representatives for a different seat. I commend them all. I would like to particularly acknowledge Teresa Gambaro, who proves that hard work and dedication does pay off, and also Jane Prentice, who I know will work just as hard as the federal member for Ryan as she did when she was a councillor for

Walter Taylor Ward. Sincere congratulations to Wyatt Roy, who, and I am quite confident, has a great future ahead of him. Finally to Warren Entsch: you just can't keep a good man down.

I want to thank all Parliament House staff—chamber staff, security guards, committee staff, staff in the cafeteria and at Aussie's—all those people that make our great parliament function every day. You have made me feel so welcome on my return. I also would like to acknowledge the former member for Bonner, Kerry Rae. Politics is a tough business and I know from personal experience the pain of losing. I want to wish Kerry and her family all the best in her future endeavours.

Finally, to the residents of Bonner I say this: former senator Neville Bonner embodied perseverance and a commitment to all Australians. In the spirit of perseverance and a commitment to my community, I am truly humbled that you saw fit to return me as your elected representative. I thank you for the trust you have placed in me and I will serve you faithfully and tirelessly.

**Mr GEORGANAS** (Hindmarsh) (6.03 pm)—I take the opportunity to congratulate the member for Bonner on his first speech on the second time around that he has come into this House. I am very delighted and very proud to be back in the chamber today, having been elected as a member of the Gillard Labor government and returned as the member for Hindmarsh for a third term. It is a great honour that the people of my electorate—more of them this time than ever before—have entrusted their vote to me and have asked me to represent them in this place again. I thank them sincerely for their vote of confidence. It is with even more energy, determination and passion that I return to this place with the sole purpose to fight for what is important to my constituents in the elec-

torate and deliver what is needed for the community.

If I look back over the last three years at some of the achievements over the last term, I see that among them are that all Australians now have an independent umpire, an airport noise ombudsman. We heard about that in the debate on the airports bill yesterday, and I know that you, Mr Deputy Speaker Kelvin Thomson, made a very good contribution to that particular bill. It is very important for the residents who live in and around airports that they do have an independent umpire, something I have fought for unrelentingly for many years. I wished to ensure that there was an independent person to look at these people's queries and complaints and to investigate them in an impartial way.

Another achievement in the electorate of Hindmarsh is in Glenelg, where there is a new federally funded King Street bridge and federally funded CCTV cameras for the precinct. There is also a water pipeline, the Glenelg to Adelaide pipeline, which will help South Australia save up to 5.5 billion litres of water per year. And there is money for a new headquarters in the electorate, at West Beach, for Surf Life Saving South Australia so that they can continue to do their important training work. These are just some of the things that I have worked very hard with the community to deliver over the last term of government. But I am humbled, as I said earlier, that the good people of Hindmarsh have recognised that and asked me to do the job of representing them for another term.

Before I speak a bit more about all those projects, I would like to quickly take a moment to thank the people who have supported my campaign. As you would know, Mr Deputy Speaker, without the support of one's family things would be impossible to achieve. It was the sixth federal campaign that my family has been through. The sup-

port that they give me—and their patience—is nothing short of miraculous, as those of us in this place with families all know.

To all the volunteers who helped put up corflutes, letterboxed flyers, doorknocked, made phone calls and lent a hand for all sorts of odd jobs, thank you for your important and valuable support. Many of the volunteers who helped out have been helping my campaign for a long time, and I thank them very sincerely for their ongoing dedication to the Labor cause in Hindmarsh and Australia.

As I said, for me the last three years have been very rewarding because I have been able to deliver a series of projects which are important to the electorate as well as more broadly. I will take a moment to outline them for the House. Of all the campaigns I have been involved in there is no doubt that getting the Aircraft Noise Ombudsman up and running has been one of the hardest. In opposition I had two private member's bills in this House that fell on deaf ears, so I am very pleased that the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, the Hon. Anthony Albanese, has brought these to fruition.

I started campaigning for the rights of residents living under the flight path well before I was a politician or even a political candidate. I live under the flight path and have lived under it all my life. To ensure that there was a voice for the residents, from the early eighties I have been involved with the community groups that appeared in and around the area. It has taken more than a decade including, as I said, two private member's bills which I put up in opposition. In the end we finally got a federal Labor government back and we got the common sense regarding an ombudsman as well. As I said, I would like to thank Minister Albanese sincerely for his support over many years on this particular issue because he has applied

the sort of common sense to the issue sorely lacking by those opposite.

Unless you have lived under the flight path yourself it is hard to understand how over the years aircraft noise can grind you down when it happens day after day, week after week and year after year. You see the sleep-deprived residents sometimes, and it is something I am familiar with after spending, as I said, my entire life living under that flight path. After thousands of letters, phone calls, emails and faxes to my office over the years about aircraft noise we can finally provide the constituents of Hindmarsh with a place to get the sort of help they are looking for. After this great slog, which has been the longest campaign of my life, it was with great satisfaction that I saw the Aircraft Noise Ombudsman come into effect on 1 September 2010.

I heard the debate over the last few days on the Airports Amendment Bill. It was quite sad to hear the opposition procrastinating and talking negatively about the good things that came out of that bill. I suppose it is sad that the coalition always gives transport to a National, because I think a Liberal Party member would have been more understanding of the thousands of people that live around privatised capital city airports. All you have to do is look at the current minister, Minister Albanese, to see what a contrast he is to the former Nationals minister and look at what a difference there is when we see what is being delivered for residents that live around airports.

For my electorate this matter is very important especially for the community groups and for people like Bob Owen and the Netley Residents Association. The Aircraft Noise Ombudsman is a huge improvement on the old system and will help to maintain the good balance we have between the needs of airports, airlines and communities, especially

in the western suburbs in Adelaide. I think we are incredibly lucky to have such a fantastic hub, which is only six kilometres from the CBD, but we need that good balance because there are residents in and around those six kays from the CBD.

Another issue in the electorate was law and order and it is a concern of many people living in the electorate, which is one of the demographically oldest in the country. I was very pleased when the Minister for Home Affairs responded to lobbying from the community and the Neighbourhood Watch groups and announced \$350,000 worth of CCTV cameras and other safety measures for Glenelg.

Glenelg is the second most visited tourist destination in South Australia. Over two million visitors come to Glenelg annually and the local businesses are constantly striving to attract even more. I am grateful for the work of the tourism forum in Glenelg. The traders association, along with the tourism forum, are strong supporters of tourism, along with the strong support from the local council. Councillor Tim Looker constantly strives to maintain the vibrancy and attractiveness of the area. It is a never-ending effort, and a major event or a high profile visitor lifts both the income and spirits of local businesses, but with this comes the need to ensure that the area is safe and friendly for visitors and locals alike.

Local groups such as Glenelg Neighbourhood Watch, the Jetty Road Mainstreet Board, the Glenelg Residents Association and the City of Holdfast Bay work together to ensure there is a good balance between the interests of businesses and residents. It was a combination of these groups who as early as 2009 raised the issue with me of the need for more CCTV cameras and safety measures in Glenelg to help combat crime and antisocial behaviour in the area.

I would like to sincerely thank everyone who participated in extensive consultations directly with the Minister for Home Affairs, Brendan O'Connor, who visited my electorate three times to personally consult with the stakeholders. Some of those stakeholders were Senior Constable First Class Michael McMorrow from Glenelg Police Station, who brought this need to my attention in his role as the Glenelg Neighbourhood Watch liaison officer as early as 2009. Also I mention the City of Holdfast Bay council, who will be receiving the funding in order to implement the measures. We met with Chief Inspector Les Buckley from the Sturt Police Station, who got up very early on a cold and rainy Sunday morning to come to the meeting with the minister to discuss these projects.

The Taxi Council of South Australia was involved as well and the President, Wally Sievers, had also been of great assistance in providing advice to ensure taxi drivers were protected. As an ex taxi driver, who knows the risks of working late at night, I am pleased that one of the cameras is going to be relocated for a better view of the taxi rank. With this new funding the council will put in several new CCTV cameras to help detect and deter crime, which will be invaluable to our local police station and invaluable for the local community. I look forward to continuing to work with all of these groups over the next term to deliver on other local projects which are important to them and which will help to maintain Glenelg as the second-largest tourism destination in South Australia.

The Glenelg to Adelaide pipeline is another project that is significant not just in my electorate but for the whole of Adelaide, because it will recycle up to 5.5 billion litres of water per year for use on our parks and gardens and will help to protect our precious coastline at the same time. Before the pipe-

line was in place, billions of litres of storm and waste water was discharged into the Gulf St Vincent, killing sea grasses and diminishing our fragile coastal ecosystems. At the same time, the need to find a way to use water in Adelaide's parks and gardens sustainably is becoming even more acute.

After many years which I spent campaigning for the pipeline alongside the City of West Torrens and its mayor, the Hon. John Trainer, it was funded jointly by the state and federal governments. It cost \$76 million in total and was completed in January 2010, months ahead of schedule. It really is something that we can be proud of because it means that instead of letting our beautiful parklands in and around Adelaide's metropolitan areas die over summer we can now maintain those green spaces using recycled water.

I could not be more pleased that we have overcome the obstacles. We have saved the gulf and secured billions of litres of water for community benefit for many years to come. It is interesting that now they are in opposition the Liberal Party are making a lot of noise about water, because I recall that when I was sitting on the other side many years of fruitless lobbying for this pipeline fell on deaf ears. So I was very pleased to have had the opportunity to attend the opening of the Glenelg to Adelaide pipeline earlier this year with Premier Mike Rann, the Hon. Penny Wong, the Hon. Jay Weatherill, the Hon. Karlene Maywald, who was the then minister for water, and the then member for Adelaide, the Hon. Jane Lomax-Smith.

On a visit to Glenelg Wastewater Treatment Plant with Minister Burke and the South Australian water minister, the Hon. Paul Caica, earlier this year, I was impressed to hear that the quality of the water they are producing is so good that it is only one step away from being of drinking quality. I know

that the City of West Torrens Council is particularly interested in and looking forward to making use of the water from the pipeline and I thank Mayor John Trainer for his support for this project as well. Driving around Adelaide you can actually see the light-purple coloured pipes on taps in various places, and it gives me great confidence in the future to know that we have found and implemented a common-sense solution to what is going to be an increasingly common problem in the future. This project complements another project in my electorate funded by federal Labor for just under \$5 million, as part of the National Urban Water and Desalination Plan, for a new stormwater capture project at Adelaide Airport, which is naturally filtering water using a wetland environment.

It is particularly timely that I talk about federal Labor's commitment to fund the new headquarters of Surf Central, because it has already started to warm up in Adelaide and the beaches are coming alive with families, tourists, athletes and surf lifesavers. Those of you who are familiar with my electorate probably know that we have some of the most incredible beaches, from Semaphore in the north down to Henley, Grange, West Beach, Glenelg and Somerton Park. But they also come with the need for well-supported lifesaving organisations which are adequately resourced to patrol our beaches and to keep the swimmers safe and provide important water safety and first-aid training to the general community.

It is an unfortunate fact that, while South Australia is a leader in humanitarian settlement, many refugees do not know how to swim, and there have been several reports of refugees drowning on our beaches over the last few years. As well as running programs for the mainstream community, Surf Life Saving South Australia has been a leader in welcoming refugees and new migrants into

its clubs and supporting them to become leaders in their own right in the community when it comes to surf and water safety. Surf Life Saving South Australia also runs respite programs to give children with disabilities the chance to experience the beach while letting their carers have a break. It was for these reasons in particular that I lobbied hard to ensure it received the \$1.5 million it needed to build its new headquarters.

The Roads to Recovery program has delivered real benefits for communities right across Australia, as we know, providing much needed infrastructure upgrades and helping to support jobs through the worst financial crisis. I have been pleased that my local area in Hindmarsh has benefited from the program through a funding commitment which will deliver more than \$4.5 million over five years for the new King Street bridge in Glenelg. I have often talked about the importance of the Glenelg tourist precinct to South Australia and the state economy, and it was absolutely critical that the ageing bridge be replaced. That is why it was a great feeling when it was announced that Labor would fund the bridge, with the local council providing the matching funds.

Federal Labor has also been doing fantastic work on infrastructure, and Hindmarsh has seen some wonderful initiatives as a result of that work. In particular, I would like to celebrate the successes of the Regional and Local Community Infrastructure Program, which has delivered money for local sports clubs in my electorate, including funding for lighting and infrastructure upgrades for Richmond Oval and Glenelg Oval to the tune of well over \$170,000.

We also have several fantastic new bike paths which we did not have before, including the James Melrose pathway and the dual use pathway at West Lakes, as well as additional bike lines along the seafront of my

electorate. These projects will help get more people out of cars and onto bikes more often, and I applaud the government for their common-sense approach to helping people make everyday changes to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions and increase physical activity.

One of the main reasons I am proud to be a member of this Labor government is its belief in providing opportunities within our education system for children to achieve their very best, including the facilities they need to succeed. That is why it has been so heart warming to receive thanks from parents, school teachers and students for the new libraries, gyms and classrooms which have been built under Building the Education Revolution. I have recently had the pleasure of attending many openings at schools around the electorate, and the sense of excitement about the new facilities is always palpable from the teachers, students and parents.

For me, one of the most exciting parts of Labor's education commitments has been seeing the opening of trade training centres in schools in Hindmarsh, including at my old high school, Underdale High, which now has an automotive trade training centre. It was great to attend the opening of Henley High School's engineering and construction trade training centre, which was already buzzing with students working on their projects, and I am very much looking forward to returning to Thebarton Senior College—I was there just last week to see the building progress—when their trade training centre is complete.

Alongside education, there is no doubt that one of the biggest concerns in the electorate, and one which is raised with me most often, is health care, so I am looking forward to contributing to the health and hospital reform set out by the Labor government before the election. Dental care is an issue which I am hugely passionate about and, having seen

the Liberal Party block much-needed dental care in the 42nd Parliament, I am hoping that we will be able to find a way forward in this one.

Over the last term, you can see that there has been an awful lot happening in my electorate, but there is plenty more to come. I reaffirm my commitment to the people of Hindmarsh that I will continue to work as hard as I can with the Gillard Labor government towards the things that matter to them—things like a reformed healthcare system, decent dental care, a greater focus on sustainability and the environment, and of course the National Broadband Network, which will help modernise our economy and ensure that we are well placed to meet the challenges of the 21st century and a globalised economy. All of these things are important to the people of Hindmarsh and so they are important to me. I look forward to serving the electorate over the next term and thank them again for the opportunity to be their voice here in Canberra.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! Before I call the member for Flynn, I remind the House that this is the honourable member's first speech and I ask the House to extend to him the usual courtesies.

**Mr O'DOWD** (Flynn) (6.23 pm)—Mr Speaker, I am extremely proud to rise for the first time in this chamber. In doing so, I would like to acknowledge the people of Flynn, who have chosen to put their faith in me to represent their interests. So far it has been a sharp learning curve. I am excited by the prospect of being able to contribute to the wellbeing of my electorate and by the thought that my work in this place will be meaningful and will enable the residents of Flynn to enjoy the quality of life that they richly deserve.

I was born in Gladstone Hospital and raised on my parent's dairy farm at Brace-

well, Mount Larcom. We grew small crops of beans, peas, peanuts and grain to support our farm income on three 80-acre blocks, known in those days as 'soldier settlement blocks'. My parents worked hard to provide for their children, and as kids my brother, Bob, and sisters, Lorraine, Bernice and Maureen, and I worked on the farm before and after school. At an early age, my brother and sisters and I worked on farms outside our own farm to pay for our education.

I attended Bracewell State School, then Mount Larcom high school and then Rocky Grammar, where I was school captain. By the age of 17 I had worked as a contract milker and I had picked beans on our neighbours' farms, worked on the railways as a fettler and on flying gangs and then worked on construction to build a new railway line from Gladstone to Moura.

On leaving school I worked at QAL Gladstone in administration as a payroll clerk. In 1970 I went to New Guinea to work on construction at the Bougainville Copper mine. I returned to Australia in 1978 to work in the fuel industry at Gladstone at the seaport terminal before entering into my own business at Emerald in 1981 as a fuel distributor for Mobil. I sold that business in 1988 and became a partner in the Shell distributorship that covered an area from Rockhampton to Gladstone, Bundaberg and south to Maryborough. That business was sold back to Shell in 1998. I bought and renovated an old pub in Rockhampton, renaming it O'Dowd's Irish Pub, which was sold in 2004. My current business is Busted Building Supplies, which I have operated since 1998. I would like to thank Bernie, Ernie and Julie for keeping the business running while I have been away.

Each of the two above categories of business was sold to make way for the entry in these areas by Coles and Woolworths to the

fuel and alcohol and gaming businesses. Now my current business is under threat by the entry of Coles and Woolworths, again, into the hardware business.

In my early years I enjoyed playing cricket at home in Australia and in PNG. I have played rugby league and squash. I still enjoy a game of golf and I have been the President of the Calliope Country Club for over 20 years. My real passion is horse racing, and I have dabbled in most aspects of the game: owner, breeder, bookmaker, and punter, win or lose. Currently I am on the Capricornia Country Racing Association board, and we face a continuing uphill battle to keep the game alive in the bush. If Queensland Racing had its way, there would only be racing in the south-east corner and two or three centres along the Queensland coast. I have led three veteran cricket teams, called the 'Gladstone Muddies', to New Zealand, England and South Africa.

The electorate of Flynn is a very large electorate. It covers over 133,000 square kilometres, extending from Taroom in the south-west to Anakie, Rubyvale and the Gemfields, to the agricultural and mining centres of Emerald, Springsure, Rolleston, and Capella and through to the mining towns of Blackwater, Tieri, Moura and Theodore. Biloela, with its connection to agriculture and mining, opens out to Thangool, Monto, and Eidsvold, extending down to the citrus fields of Gayndah and Mundubbera. My electorate takes in the towns of Biggenden and Mount Perry, Gin Gin, Wondai and Proston and includes an area north of Bundaberg—Paul's territory—with the beachside towns of Moore Park and Agnes Water and the hinterland towns of Rosedale, Avondale and Miriam Vale.

The city of Gladstone, with its wonderful harbour, and the coastal communities of Tannum Sands and Boyne Island are the in-

dustrial hub of Queensland, providing much of the nation's wealth through mining exports and industries including aluminium, cement and soon the new LNG industry. To the north and north-west the electorate takes in the growing communities of Gracemere and Mount Morgan. Gracemere has been in five different electorates in the past 15 years. No wonder little has been done to benefit this deserving community. Let us leave it where it is, and I will do my best to make sure it is never neglected again.

The electorate of Flynn contributes to the growth of the Australian economy through the production of aluminium, cement, coal, light metals, chemicals, a range of quarry products and gemstones. We grow sugar cane, citrus fruit, nuts, grain, grapes, beef, pork and fruit.

The fishing industry is vitally important to our coastal communities, and I will do everything in my power to ensure that this industry is not damaged any further by irresponsible closures. Do you agree, Ron Boswell? The fishing industry already has one arm tied behind its back competing with the low cost of production in South-East Asia. Our fishermen are paying 90c a litre for fuel compared with 22c a litre in Asia. Inferior imports that come from countries that have less than acceptable health standards should never be promoted over our freshly caught, locally produced seafood.

Tourism is important to Central Queensland, and we need to do more to help the various tourism boards across Flynn. The three coal fired power stations in Gladstone, Callide and Stanwell supply Central Queensland and the rest of Queensland with their power. There are those in this place who would like to see the demise of these three coal fired power stations, without offering any real solution. I know of many projects in Central Queensland that are on hold until the

uncertainty surrounding the MRRT and the ETS is resolved. Last week I was informed that a \$10 million accommodation expansion program in Emerald was on hold pending resolution of the mining tax and ETS issues.

Regional Australia and in particular Central Queensland have suffered through lack of investment in infrastructure. Our roads are a national disgrace. The National Highway between Gin Gin and Rockhampton is in need of a complete makeover. It is too narrow and too rough for the number of vehicles that use it. It is not only the Bruce Highway but the roads west to Emerald and Biloela that are also in urgent need of improvement. Our highways are the workplace of transport workers and yet we give them substandard conditions in which to perform. It is a testament to their skill that we do not have more accidents involving heavy vehicles.

For almost a decade our regional health system has deteriorated at an alarming rate. Contrary to what the government says, GP superclinics are not the answer for regional cities or towns. They will only duplicate what the private practices are already delivering, whilst at the same time competing with those practices for doctors, nurses and patients. Haus sik emi bugga-up tru. That is pidgin English for, 'Our hospitals are in a mess.' I have cleaned that up a bit too!

Gladstone, the nation's industrial hub, does not have adequate facilities to handle emergencies involving multiple injuries. People in Gladstone have to travel up to three times per week, over 100 kilometres, to Rockhampton for dialysis because Gladstone does not have the equipment or the manpower to provide this necessary service. Emerald has over 600 births per year. Over 300 of them have to be performed in Rockhampton or other centres because the Emerald birthing centre can only handle low-risk births. This places strain on the fathers and

families, who have to fend for themselves while the mother is away for sometimes up to three weeks in another town. This same situation is played out in many towns throughout Flynn. A better solution would be to reinstate these hospitals to fully functioning hospitals with a range of specialist services. For example, Gladstone, Emerald and Biloela hospitals should become 'hubs', with Gladstone specialising in emergency response and outpatients. Emerald and Biloela hospitals should be rural training hospitals, providing specialist support services.

The government's spin doctors are good at telling Central Queenslanders that we are in boom times, that things have never been so good. But our regional towns and cities are in decline; they are dying. They are dying because of Labor's centralist policies. Money being earned in Central Queensland is being used to build infrastructure in the south-east corner of Queensland. The railway has stopped running to towns like Gayndah, Mundubbera, Eidsvold and Monto. Industries like logging and dairy have been stopped around Monto. Five years ago there were 51 piggeries in Central Queensland; now there are five. Pork imports from America, Denmark and Canada, which are heavily subsidised by their governments, account for about 80 per cent of all packaged pork products sold in Australia.

What is it about Labor and its preoccupation with destroying regional Australia? What does Labor say to these families? These families are fed up with the spin. All we get in Central Queensland are a few crumbs from the rich man's table. Show us the money and we will show you how our regional towns and cities can become vibrant again. We will show you the energy and resilience of our regional communities. Let us in the regional areas manage our money. Let us employ local contractors and people and let us source the materials from local suppli-

ers and we will show you how the can-do attitude of Central Queenslanders will get better value for our important tax dollars.

I was in Eidsvold two weeks ago and I met with a group of 15 people who were concerned about their town and how they have been forgotten by the Queensland government. Aged care is at the top of their priority list. They desperately need a 30-bed aged-care facility now. Such a facility will not only provide necessary care for ageing residents but allow them the dignity of remaining in care in an environment that is conducive to a quality way of life. No-one wants to spend their retirement years in a hospital bed if all they need is good quality accommodation in the company of their friends.

A 30-bed aged-care facility in Eidsvold would also provide a wide range of employment opportunities in health care, food preparation, cleaning and gardening for the young people of the town. Cut out the middleman. Let the people take control of these community projects.

In Eidsvold I met a 15-year-old girl called Lucy who posed the following question to me: 'Mr O'Dowd, congratulations on your election as the Member for Flynn. Could you ask the Minister for Sport, Mark Arbib, if he is able to provide assistance for rural communities to develop a strategy for youth sports development?' The kids in our community are proud to live in regional centres. Why should they be deprived of sporting facilities because they do not live in the populated areas?

The electorate of Flynn was named in honour of the late Reverend John Flynn, 'Flynn of the Outback'. Several names for the new electorate were suggested, but it was the submission from long-time Central Queensland resident and friend of mine, Greg McCann, that won the day. In his sub-

mission, Greg pointed out that John Flynn had lived in the outback for most of his life, setting up hostels and bush hospitals for pastoralists, miners, road workers, railwaymen and other settlers. He witnessed the daily struggle of these pioneers, living in remote areas where just two doctors provided the only medical care for an area of almost two million square kilometres. It is appropriate that the electorate of Flynn is named after a visionary pioneer who struggled to establish a credible medical service for regional Australians, just like the people of Flynn are continuing to do today.

As you know, Mr. Speaker, the road to this place is long and arduous. A first-time candidate and now first-time member of parliament, I rely on the support of many people and I would like to acknowledge the support of my family, friends and supporters. My mother is here today and obviously her influence on my life has played a part in my life. She helped out during the campaign by attending functions and of course by offering support to me at all times. My dad, Andrew Desmond O'Dowd, passed away in 1985. He instilled in me the value of hard work.

I have had the love and support of my son, Ben, and daughter, Amber, Ben's wife, Liz, and Amber's husband, Jason. I have five beautiful grandkids and I love them all. I say hi to Phillip, Nicholas, Garreth, Rye and Rainey. My sister Bernice and her husband, John; my brother, Bobby, and his wife, Joyce; along with my sister Maureen and her husband, Kevin; sister Lorraine and her husband, George, all supported me beyond the call of duty. My partner, Shirley, who is up in the gallery, has given me enormous support and encouragement, and without her the whole adventure would have been all the more difficult. My good mate Kim—the publican next door in Rockhampton—and his wife, Dianne, are here today and I thank

them for their friendship and support. It's a different story now, mate!

I think I had the most incredible campaign committee. They did what most thought could not be done. Despite an incredible 'sandbagging' exercise by the incumbent, my team focused on the real issues, presented them to the electorate, and the people of Flynn did the rest. I would like to personally mention the efforts of Don Holt, Greg McCann, Wendy Hatfield, Leanne Ruge, Graham Hartley, Gus Stedman, Os Blacker, Ken Crooke, Tony Goodwin, Kim Mobbs, Hec Kilah, Bob McCosker, Russell Schroder and Graham McVean. These people worked tirelessly from our campaign headquarters, and I thank them from the bottom of my heart.

Flynn covers 133,000 square kilometres and the people that looked after my campaign in the South Burnett, the Central Highlands and out around Rolleston, Springsure and Taroom include John Engwicht, Mike Burns and Gail Nixon, and Barry Masters at Agnes Water. To the many people who worked on my booths and to the team that helped with scrutineering, I say thank you.

I would like to acknowledge the skill and professionalism of Bruce McIvor and Brad Henderson and their LNP team. The decision to form the LNP in Queensland certainly proved to be a wise decision. During the campaign I was grateful for the assistance of Senators Barnaby Joyce, Ron Boswell, Ian Macdonald, Connie Fierravanti-Wells, George Brandis, Russell Trood, Brett Mason and Nigel Scullion. The guidance and wisdom of National Party Leader, Warren Truss, was very valuable to me during the campaign, and I thank him for visiting Flynn with me on three separate occasions.

Many thanks go to Joe Hockey, Ian Macfarlane and Paul Neville, and Queensland Opposition Leader, John-Paul Lang-

broek. Finally, I am grateful to our leader, Tony Abbott, for taking the time to meet with the people of Flynn just before the election. It was a mighty effort from everyone and I am honoured to have worked with you all.

Some people refer to me as 'the bulldog at the gate'. Some people have unkindly said that I look like a bulldog! I can assure you, Mr. Speaker, that when I have an issue that needs to be followed through on for my electorate, I will be an absolute 'bulldog at the gate' with sharp teeth and a loud bark, making sure that the Prime Minister honours the promises made to Flynn in the days immediately prior to the election.

Here are a few of them: \$155 million for the Calliope Crossroads upgrade; \$50 million for the Yeppen Bridge and roundabout upgrade at Rockhampton; \$20 million for the southern approach to Gin Gin; \$70 million for stages 2 and 3 of the Gladstone Ports development road; the Gary Larson football oval in Miriam Vale; a sporting complex in Emerald; and \$1 million to outfit the Banana training centre. But wait, there's more! Labor promised to fix our health system and they promised to build sporting facilities for our regional towns. I want it all started, and started in this term of parliament. Labor has been talking about the Calliope Crossroads for the past three years—same with the Yeppen upgrade and the southern approach to Gin Gin. Stop the talk—start the work.

I promise the people of Flynn that I will be the 'bulldog at the gate' and I will work in this place for the restoration of our regional towns and cities. I thank the people of Flynn for their vote of confidence and, Mr Speaker, I thank you.

**The SPEAKER**—Order! Before I call the member for Longman, I remind honourable members that this is the member's first speech. I therefore ask that the usual courtesies be extended to him.

**WYATT ROY** (Longman) (6.45 pm)—I am deeply humbled to stand here as a new member of the Australian House of Representatives, a house that is gradually becoming more representative of our diverse Australian community. My presence in this place was never perceived to be highly likely. Indeed, the path I took to this place was never the most likely course for an individual to take. However, I am immensely proud of the fact that I am a young person elected to this parliament. I am immensely proud of the fact that it was the Liberal National Party and the Liberal Party federally that has recognised that our parliament works more effectively, and better government is delivered, when we bring a diverse background of people to this place.

I am humbled and proud of the fact that here on the coalition benches I am joined by the member for Hasluck, Ken Wyatt. I am proud to have found my political home in the Liberal National Party, not only the side of politics that is home for the member for Hasluck, the member for Solomon and me in this parliament but also the side of politics that provided the first federal woman MP, Dame Enid Lyons; the first woman to administer a department, Dame Annabelle Rankin; and her successor, representing Queensland in the Senate, the first Indigenous parliamentarian, Neville Bonner.

I am proud to come from the party which appointed the first minister for Aboriginal affairs and the first federal minister for the environment. And, of course, the first female ever elected to the parliament of Queensland also came from this side of politics. She was Irene Longman, and I am privileged to represent the seat named in her honour. These firsts represent real and practical outcomes that we have achieved based on the merit of the individual, not on an unfair quota system.

It is the Liberal side of politics that believes that liberalism is the path to greater fairness, that enforced equality never liberates. It is the Liberal side of politics that is the side of opportunity. We are the party based on encouragement, rather than subsidy; of a hand-up, not a handout; the party that has achieved practical outcomes through real action, not cheap political rhetoric. Some people say we are a conservative party, but which party was prepared to endorse a 19-year-old in a winnable seat and then support, mentor and guide that candidate through one of the most fiercely contested political campaigns this country has ever seen?

While I accept that my presence here was never perceived to be likely, I took a simple approach—an approach shared by my party; an approach which says that the political process is not something people should feel disenfranchised from. Our Australian democracy should be owned by all Australians. The easiest thing in life is to sit on the sidelines and complain. It is much harder to stand up for what you believe in. I could never have done that without the support and progressive thinking of the Liberal side of politics. While I am immensely proud to stand in this place as the youngest person ever elected to any parliament in Australia, I am first and foremost the member for Longman. In this vein, I take the view that I am not a young member of parliament; I am a member of parliament who happens to be young.

The electors of Longman have placed in me an enormous amount of trust, and it is my commitment to this great local community that I will work tenaciously in this place and in my community to repay that trust. Longman is an area not defined, in my mind, by its geographical borders but by the character of its people. They are a hardworking people bound by a common aspirational mindset. When Robert Menzies was laying the foun-

dations of the modern Liberal Party, he said that there was an entire section of our society made up of forgotten people. John Howard called them 'decent battlers'.

In Longman, there are many forgotten battlers. They do not define their success by how big their house is, but they do measure their success by the relationships they have with their families, friends and local communities. I found my political home in the Liberal National Party, in large part because we believe in supporting the individual and their enterprise. We believe in fair reward for hard work. We believe that common sense and a pragmatic approach is a far better guide for government than rigid ideology will ever be.

I see my own personal story as a Liberal story, a story of opportunity and enterprise. My father, who is here today, has taught me the importance of service, of compassion, of responsibility and of a quiet but steadfast pride in our country. He has taught me to be tenacious but to also have a sense of humour. My father started out his working life on a shovel. He took hold of the opportunities that presented themselves and worked hard to provide me, in turn, with my own opportunities and choices. Not only did my father teach me that I should take what I do seriously but also he taught me that I should never take myself too seriously.

Longman is one of the most picturesque electorates in Australia, ranging from scenic mountains to the beautiful Pumicestone Passage. But it also faces significant challenges into the future. We have faced, and will continue to face, significant pressure on our infrastructure and services based on unprecedented population growth. This population pressure is the source of all the great challenges that my local community faces into the future. It affects local health services, infrastructure and sustainable development.

Rather than taking a bureaucratic approach to these challenges, our approach to government would have offered real solutions. For example, we took to the last election a great policy to establish local hospital boards. This would have given individuals who face health problems on a day-to-day basis a direct say in how health services are provided locally into the future. It would have empowered local communities.

In terms of sustainable development, a coalition government would have worked in partnership with local community groups at a grassroots level to establish a standing Green Army. These are just two examples of initiatives which would represent true people power, as opposed to a bureaucratic, top-down approach. Someone once said to me, 'Governments don't have any money of their own; they only have the people's money, held in trust.' Well, I can think of \$8 billion of wasted taxpayers' money which would have been very well directed to improve local health services.

As a young person, I hope that I can bring to this place a long-term perspective, an intergenerational perspective, to the significant policy challenges facing this nation into the future. I am acutely aware of the demographic challenges that face Australia. The Future Fund, which the previous Treasurer, the Hon. Peter Costello, had the vision to set up, is an important and practical response to this challenge. I know that my generation must take personal responsibility for our financial future, in particular for superannuation. Another significant challenge that this nation will face in the future is not only climate change but inevitably the inseparable issues of energy security and energy interdependence. These will all play an important role in how the Australian economy is restructured post the current mining boom.

We should take advantage of the opportunities we have now, as the previous coalition government did, for significant policy reform, such as the Higher Education Endowment Fund. This fund was established as a perpetual fund to guarantee funding for capital works and research facilities by the last coalition government and was abolished by its successor. And we introduced voluntary student unionism, following our consistent policy approach that freedom of association should also apply to those enrolled at university. It should not be a condition of pursuing academic study that people are made to join an organisation which is essentially political in nature. And it is ironic that, where all political parties in this place accept that there should be no closed shops in the workplace, there are still some people in this place who are happy to apply that compulsion to universities, even if they do that by stealth. These significant reforms were designed to utilise the opportunities we have now to plan for the future—showing vision rather than just catering for the short-term election cycle.

My upbringing influenced the political path I have taken. Those of us who come to this place have weighed up what each party stands for and what they offer. For me, it was an easy choice. I wanted to join the party of opportunity, the party based on encouragement rather than subsidy—as I said, of a hand up, not a handout.

Coming from a strawberry farm, one of the things that has always had a significant impact on me is the diversity of a seasonal workforce. We had a united nations of men and women on working holidays, earning money to make their way around Australia. I realise now that one of the particular benefits to me was to be reminded on a daily basis how lucky we are to live in this nation. We accept almost without question that our elections are free and fair. We accept that our

judges make decisions based on law, and that they should not be subject to political influence. We accept that our Public Service is appointed on merit and serves the government of the day, regardless of its political colour. We accept that the courageous Australian Defence Force will carry out the policy of the government in a diligent and professional way. But above all we accept that there are many opportunities available to everyone, not defined by the economic or social circumstances of our background. That is not the case in many other countries. This openness, sense of equality and birthright to participate in the political processes of this nation is a constant reminder to me, at a personal level, of the privileges of being an Australian. It was a significant motivation for me to seek preselection for the seat of Longman.

I am the first elected representative younger than this building, home of our political traditions, and I am acutely aware of the trust placed in us by the people who elect us. One of the refreshing things that I am grateful for is the enthusiastic response and support I have received from young Australians across the country. I take this opportunity to thank them, and I take this opportunity to encourage all Australians to actively participate in the political processes of this country, whatever their political beliefs.

A little over 14 million people voted on 21 August and I remind the House that 2.6 million of them were young Australians aged 18 to 30. Many of these people are not so much disengaged from politics; they feel disenfranchised and excluded. The political parties of Australia—all political parties—have to offer more. They have to re-engage. Every decision we take, every vote that occurs here, affects someone. Politics should not be something that people avoid; it should be something that people own.

I am the third member for Longman, and I acknowledge my immediate predecessor and his service to this House. But in particular I acknowledge my political predecessor, the Hon. Mal Brough. I am sure members across the political divide will agree that Mal was a very substantial contributor to this House and will acknowledge the deep commitment and compassion that Mal took to his role as minister responsible for Indigenous affairs. In an area of public policy that has always been challenging, Mal Brough shook established orthodoxies and made us realise how much successive governments had failed in their duty. Politics is often about doing not what is popular but what is right. I believe that Mal Brough deserves lasting recognition for understanding that and taking a principled decision.

When we make the decision to stand for parliament, we all have some idea of the sort of Australia we want to see. For me, it is a country of high productivity, a modern, enterprise economy where barriers to opportunity are minimised; where small business is valued as much as big business; where taxpayers' money is valued; where, as I said before, we have a system of government that recognises that governments do not have any money—they only have our money; and where there is a clear focus on productivity, job growth and sustainable development.

During the campaign, I developed close relationships with the local Indigenous community. I am deeply impressed by their concerns for the predicaments young Aboriginal men and women find themselves in. These Indigenous leaders are wonderful people who support not only their own communities, but the community at large. I look forward to working in partnership at a local grassroots level to find practical solutions to very real problems, solutions that bypass an often intrusive and often disruptive bureauc-

racy, perhaps guided by good intentions but unable to deliver effective policy outcomes.

I have enjoyed meeting many local healthcare professionals, youth workers, community organisations and other individuals who have dedicated themselves to serving their local community and finding practical solutions to problems we might otherwise easily overlook. These are the people who define the character of Longman.

I am enormously proud to be here as a member of the Liberal-National Party. It was this side of politics, the Menzies government, which ended the marriage bar in the public service. It was this side of politics, the Holt government, which brought forward the 1967 referendum to remove from our Constitution the awful discrimination against Indigenous Australians. It was this side of politics, the Gorton government, which moved to give federal protection to Queensland's Great Barrier Reef. It was this side of politics, the Fraser government, which introduced the family allowance, and established the Institute of Multicultural Affairs and SBS. It was this side of politics, the Howard government, which brought in vital reforms to our taxation system, both for individual citizens and business, and, in the words of a former senior adviser to the leader of the Australian Democrats, did more for the environment than any other government since federation. And it was this side of politics, the previous coalition government, which established within our welfare system the concept of mutual obligation. Mutual obligation was introduced, eventually received bipartisan political support and has lifted hundreds of thousands of Australians from welfare dependence. As I said before: a hand up, not a hand out. These are all lasting achievements by coalition governments that have improved Australian society. These are some of the reasons I see myself as a Liberal.

I want to particularly thank those that have supported me in my role as a candidate and now as a member of parliament. Like all of us, I would not be standing in this House without the support of a great team. I sincerely thank my parliamentary colleagues for their help during the campaign. I also record my appreciation for the professional support I received from the executive and secretariat of the LNP.

My parents, family and friends know how much their support has meant to me. I also had my unofficial family: the Longman campaign team. They did an amazing job, often in the face of adversity. It is impossible for me to name everyone who lent their time, money, blood, sweat and tears to the team effort. However, there are two particular people who I must mention: my campaign chairperson, Mrs Beth Harris, who I am eternally grateful to, for her unwavering support and faith, not only in me but in our shared belief in the very principles we were fighting for. She is a Liberal through and through. To my political mentor, Mrs Carol Humphries, I say, 'Thank you for being there to make me believe I could do it.' I owe Beth and Carol, and the great volunteer campaign team, more than I can say.

In his first speech, on 28 February 1956, another young Queenslander, the new member for Moreton, Jim Killen, spoke words that particularly resonate with me today. He said:

In the deliberations of this assembly I cannot as yet be guided by experience. I can only be guided by plain good intentions.

This is not a bad first principle for any new member of parliament to follow. I thank the House.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Clare**) adjourned.

## NATIONAL HEALTH AND HOSPITALS NETWORK BILL 2010

### Second Reading

Debate resumed from 25 October, on motion by **Ms Roxon**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr S Georganas)**—Order! The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the member for Dickson 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. I call the member for Bowman in continuation.

**Mr LAMING (Bowman)** (7.07 pm)—The mountain is climbed—you are up the top, Mr Roy; enjoy the sunshine. To the many people who would have said Wyatt would not happen, Wyatt could not happen, Wyatt was unlikely to happen: one man who happens to be young set about proving Wyatt would happen—and it did. You are freed, in order to be bound again in public service. But let us also remember that anything that can happen once can surely happen a second time, although it may not be for a very long time.

The National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2010 is not about safety and quality in health care, as I have already explained. This is about another enormous statutory authority that further represents a slew of bureaucratic legislation coming from this Labor government. There were fast-moving, streamlined, safety and quality boards and commissions before. We did not need a multimillion-dollar solution to further slow down the work of this place. But this is not a single piece of legislation on its own. We see other pieces of legislation introducing even more statutory authorities into health care in this country, while the condi-

tions in remote and rural Australia continue to decline.

We know the words 'Closing the Gap'. But the one single intervention, the Northern Territory Emergency Response, has been utterly ignored and the back has been turned by this government on outcomes since 2007 and the election of the Rudd government. Because, while their lips move and suggest that the intervention is supported, the safety of children and the quality of health care continues to struggle for the simple reason that there is no commitment to improving this intervention.

Last week the Bath report delivered to the Territory government found not a single element of personal responsibility involved in the disgraceful area of child abuse, but instead they set about making 147 bureaucratic recommendations to the Territory government. No wonder that jurisdiction has lost its way. The recommendations from the Bath inquiry suggested that we needed more process, framework, agencies, peak bodies, principles, consultation, planning processes, preventions, complaint processes, education strategies, more advisors, planning units, more KPIs, workforce mediation, more outsourcing, clarity, administration, more training, more data collection, partnerships, more frameworks to be adopted, more skills to be evaluated, more consulting, more initiatives, more strategies and, yes, more guidelines. You would think that the Bath inquiry only came to an end when they ran out of bureaucratic nouns! They got to 147 of them. But was there a single mention of personal responsibility? Was there a single mention that parenting is something that needs to be the first and foremost role of every parent?

In the NT intervention, where for the first time in Indigenous history a systematic move was made against alcohol abuse for the sake of the children, towards school attendance

for the sake of the children, towards health checks for the sake of the children, we see not a single modification or reform being made. And what do we know as a result? From 2008 to 2009 enrolments in school have declined. Attendance at school has declined. The reporting of domestic violence and alcohol related infringements have not fallen away. What we are saying is there have been no improvements; the lips are moving but the warmth of the embrace is not there for that intervention—and with it goes the future of an entire generation of children who are seeking safety and quality in their health care.

Another report passed my desk this week: the *Better hospital care for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders people experiencing heart attack*. Again, it has been three years now—the time is ticking. But there has been no improvement in Indigenous liaison, no improvement in cultural familiarity for staff, no improvement in introducing Indigenous people to the governance of our hospitals, no improvement in making mainstream services better for Indigenous people. We have a 20-times rate of early discharge by Indigenous Australians, who check out and walk out of the best health care in the world for the simple reason that it is not one with which they are familiar, not one to which they have been introduced to or are able to feel safe and comfortably culturally. That is a priority of the National Heart Foundation; it must be a priority of this government. It should not sit for weeks and months without response. It is of the essence of safety and quality. It is one thing to be getting the drugs or the infusion wrong, or to have adverse reactions in the First World health system that we all enjoy; but quite another when you look through the reams and reams of bureaucratic legislation we are faced with on this side of the House. As I said: the lips are moving, but nothing is

changing in remote, regional and Indigenous Australia.

**Mr CHEESEMAN** (Corangamite) (7.12 pm)—I congratulate the member for Longman for a terrific first speech. It was certainly a speech that I listened to very closely, and a lot of things he had to say are also things that I very much personally believe in.

Mr Deputy Speaker Georganas, I think this is the first time I have had the opportunity to formally congratulate you on being returned to your seat, and of course to offer congratulations to you on becoming a deputy speaker. Today I rise to speak on the National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2010. It is with great pride and pleasure that I do so. I would certainly like to commend the Prime Minister and the Minister for Health and Ageing for introducing these very significant bills to this parliament. I look forward to the hopefully safe passage of this legislation through both chambers so that we can get on with the business of delivering Labor's comprehensive plan to reform our national health and hospital system. This bill is about the implementation of the National Health and Hospitals Network, by establishing the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. I will refer to this body as 'the commission' through the course of this contribution.

The commission will create better health and better hospitals for all Australians, and certainly we on this side of the chamber, the Gillard government, very much believe in that. The commission will be important in improving the safety and quality of health care into the future. The commission will be one of three governing agencies that will oversee our health and hospital reform, and I look forward to contributing further on that in future. The other two will be the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority and the National Performance Authority, two instru-

ments of government that will be very important for our healthcare system.

These will be the most significant health reforms since the introduction of Medicare a couple of decades ago by the former Hawke-Keating Labor government. These reforms are important because they are the most substantial reforms we have seen in this place for many years. This government will be creating the National Health and Hospitals Network that is funded nationally and will be, very importantly, run locally, enabling local clinicians and communities to oversee the running of our health and hospital system.

These reforms have been through consultation. In fact, there have been hundreds of meetings held across the nation in consulting with communities in developing this model. That is something I believe in strongly, the need for consultation. Indeed, consultation took place in my community and my clinicians, my doctors and my hospitals were able to feed in directly to government to ensure that we got these mechanisms correct.

This bill will help change the way in which health services are delivered, with patients having better access to services. I know that most people in this chamber, certainly those on this side, believe in delivering quality health care for all of our communities. This bill will also help with preventive health and health care outside our hospitals. It will also be significant in helping regional electorates like my electorate of Corangamite. As you no doubt know, Mr Deputy Speaker, many regional people find it generally difficult to be able to access medical help when they need it because of the tyranny of distance and the challenges of getting clinicians, doctors and nurses employed in our regions. I believe this will help in that regard. That is one of the reasons why I am so supportive of the bill, because it is in the

regions where I believe the most significant reform will take place as we deploy the National Health and Hospitals Network through the course of the next few years. This will make the federal government the majority funder of Australia's public hospital services. We have had report after report that show that our health system had been on an unsustainable downward curve for quite some time and it is only the financial clout of the Commonwealth that can bring sustainability back to our health and hospital system.

The Commonwealth government will provide \$35.2 million over the next four years to jointly fund, with the states and territories, the commission. This Labor government is implementing major reforms to funding the Australian healthcare system. This funding will help our healthcare system to have a sustainable future. That is very important. If you have a look at any of the significant work that has been undertaken by any of the reputable health economists, you can see that expenses are growing, and we know that the contribution that needs to be made by the public purse will need to grow to ensure that Australians get access to sustainable world-class health care. That is a part of the need for the significant investment that we will be making to the national health and hospital system. Things like sustainability and quality, the capacity of our health system and better connecting care for people right across the country, particularly in electorates like Corangamite, are significant parts of the important work that we need to undertake.

Today I would like to touch on a few things that we are doing in my electorate to benefit my community in the broader Geelong area. I particularly want to touch on the importance of preventive health and better access to services. These two areas of health will greatly help some of the most vulnerable people in my electorate but also right across Australia. This government will provide bet-

ter access to services across the country in health. The National Health and Hospitals Network will deliver to local communities in my electorate better access to health services.

The Gillard government will also continue to establish the national after-hours GP and primary care services, which are critically important for providing people with the opportunity to access information when they need it. People in my electorate speak to me regularly about the difficulty they often have in accessing GPs and nurses. Again the Gillard government is investing substantially to help address these challenges. Through this bill and the National Health and Hospitals Network, the government will invest \$355 million to create more GP superclinics and to expand GP clinics as well. This will take place in about 450 locations around the country.

I am a fortunate MP who does actually have a GP superclinic within my electorate, in the suburb of Belmont; it opened just a few months ago. It provides health care to the communities in Grovedale, Belmont, Highton and Waurin Ponds. It is pleasing to see that people are voting with their feet, because the car park is regularly filled with people accessing services from there. Most pleasing about that particular superclinic is that we are working in partnership with Deakin University. In fact they are training many of their graduates at this superclinic, providing opportunities for medical students to gain practical first-hand medical experience under the supervision of qualified doctors. I certainly look forward to seeing the graduates from the Deakin University medical school gaining that practical experience at that location and then gaining employment in many parts of regional Victoria where there are GP shortages. I look forward to seeing that over the years to come.

The National Health and Hospitals Network will also strengthen guarantees and targets to improve access to public hospital services. The government needs to do this after the previous decade in which more than \$1 billion was ripped out of our health and hospital system creating bottlenecks, skills shortages and a blow-out in access for many people to high-quality medical services that can only be provided by hospitals, when people most need them.

This government will also invest \$750 million in emergency departments across the nation. This will guarantee that patients will be either treated or admitted within a reasonable time. That is something I look forward to. The government will also overhaul the health system to ensure that there is a better deal for those on elective surgery waiting lists. As a member of parliament I realise, as I am sure most members do, that often we are dealing with patients that do find it difficult to access elective surgery, particularly if they are in pain. My staff and I spend a significant amount of time working with constituents in addressing those issues.

The reality is that we need more money to address this issue. The \$800 million for elective surgery will result in some 95 per cent of elective surgeries being delivered within the clinically recommended time frame. That is certainly a dramatic improvement from the circumstances that we found ourselves in when we went into government in 2007. This is a major difference between the Gillard government and those on the other side, who sat by for years and watched our health and hospital system groan under the strains that had been created as a consequence of a lot of resources being ripped out of the health and hospital system.

We believe in putting money into health to provide better access to services for regional people of this country. My electorate is a

significant one in which people do find it difficult to access a modern health and hospital system because of the tyranny of distance.

In the short amount of time that I have left there are a couple of major points that I wish to touch on. Geelong and the surrounding towns have a population near 200,000. The current Geelong hospital is getting to the point at which it cannot develop and grow any longer on its existing site. The state government is working through the planning processes to establish a second Geelong hospital, which will be called the Southern Geelong Hospital. It will be located within my electorate and I certainly look forward to working with the state government in the years to come to secure funding for that project under the health and hospital reform process. I have been campaigning hard on this issue for some time now.

I also wish to very briefly mention that Deakin University, which has a new medical school, will be partnering with the Epworth health network to build a new private hospital for the Geelong community. It will be located on Deakin University's Waurin Ponds site. Again, this is a much needed investment providing choice for the Geelong community. I look forward to working with Deakin University and the Epworth health group to see that investment within our community.

There is no doubt that a public health system working in partnership with a private health provider can very much deliver sustained improvements for our communities across the nation. I commend the bill to the House. *(Time expired)*

**Ms GAMBARO** (Brisbane) (7.28 pm)—The National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2010 is the first step to enact the flawed Rudd health reforms. It establishes the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, currently part of the health de-

partment, as a permanent independent statutory authority.

It was intended that this act would be amended in the future to include provisions to establish the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority; however the flexibility that was to be built in for future changes that may be needed was scrapped just shortly after it was announced. This highlights that this important reform was driven by political agenda and not good policy outcome.

Any plan that increases bureaucracies and ties up hospitals even further with complicated processes in the delivery of health care to Australians is fundamentally flawed. Let me put on the record that I speak from experience having seen the atrocious mistakes of the Queensland Labor government in this particular area of health. To implement a health plan that does not give a guarantee that more dollars will arrive at the bedside for the benefit of patients and healthcare workers is bad public policy.

The coalition does support an ongoing role for the commission within existing arrangements, but we hold serious concerns about this government's and the previous government's desire to rearrange the bureaucratic structures of departments. These changes will not be efficient and Labor's record shows that its supposed health reform agenda will not even be effectively implemented.

The aims of this commission are very broad, long of ideals but short on specifics. It is very interesting when reading the bill that more pages are concerned with how the structure will be set up and the role of members than the processes under which it will work. The commission's aim to reduce harm caused by preventable errors, to reduce health care costs and to ensure the appropriateness of services is quite grand, but it is also impractical given the pending changes.

With the proposed changes it will be all things to all departments and will prove not to be the most effective means to ensure positive and effective outcomes for patients. Well-staffed, well-resourced and well-supported bed-side care providers will be the best way forward in providing safe and quality care, not a faceless bureaucracy in Canberra that sits outside the Department of Health and Ageing.

Just as the medical fraternity assesses efficacy by measuring patient outcomes, this plan offers no efficacy measures. The coalition's beds and boards policy would make a real difference by directly tying increased funding to the delivery of increased services. This policy is in step with the medical fraternity's measures of efficiency through patient outcomes. In contrast, this plan increases the bureaucratic processes and has done little to demonstrate that it will achieve better care for patients and more support for our healthcare workers. Under this plan we will see a return of Labor's wasteful spending and inefficient program delivery. Simply shifting funding by dubious means as a dominant funder will only result in unnecessary duplication of processes and structures.

Brisbane does not have a superclinic. I speak to many of the medical practitioners who tell me that they can build 10 GP super-clinics for what it costs to build one super-clinic. Brisbane does have, however, one of the world's leading hospitals in the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospital. The doctors and nurses in Brisbane that I have spoken to speak very highly of this hospital and they tell me the fundamental reason why it remains a world class hospital is that it is self-managed. This hospital makes local decisions in the interests of its patients, not decisions by some accountants and officials that run from head office in Canberra some 1,000 kilometres away. To expand on the success of the Royal Brisbane and Women's Hospi-

tal, each major referral hospital and its associated hospitals should have its own management board.

On a side note, when the former Prime Minister and member for Griffith was the Director General of Queensland—the chief bureaucrat to which the title is still quite fitting—he removed local hospital boards and reduced the number of beds. The two things this National Health and Hospitals Network Bill tries to do is to implement local boards and increase the number of beds. This is not reform; this is simply Labor covering up Labor's own mess.

The coalition has a plan to establish a \$150 million fund to assist nurses pursuing important professional development opportunities. This underlines the coalition's support of clinical best practice in our health and hospitals systems. Nurses tell me such a funding proposal would go a very long way to help provide them with up-to-date quality and respectful care at the bedside.

I have recently seen what a fantastic job nurses do in various hospitals in Brisbane and I congratulate and thank them for their patient care. One need only look at the nurses' payroll debacle in Queensland Health to see how badly a Labor government delivers for nurses and how little support they give nurses. Labor has failed hospital based nurses. It got so bad in my home state of Queensland that the current ALP National President and Labor Premier, Anna Bligh, basically told nurses to turn to charity when they were not being paid by Queensland Health. The debacle is still going on due to the severity of the Queensland Labor government's failure. It is a disgrace.

The coalition's plan to establish 20 early psychosis intervention centres and 800 beds for acute and subacute care is aimed at providing targeted health care and early prevention and intervention. Our proposal to pro-

vide an additional 60 headspace sites, providing a one-stop shop for Australians and young people with information and services relating to general health and wellbeing, and mental health and drug and alcohol services was very well received in Brisbane. At a recent AGM of the Mental Illness Fellowship of Queensland in New Farm it was put to the meeting by Professor Mendoza that the coalition's mental health policy was the most significant advance in mental health planning. In the electorate of Brisbane this was one of the most widely acclaimed policies of the coalition at the last election. I had GPs and nurses alike tell me the great importance of this policy. This is real health care reform and this is a real plan.

A current plan afoot in Brisbane to close down the Royal Children's Hospital is evidence of the reckless and wasteful approach to health care. The member for Port Adelaide, when he was Parliamentary Secretary for Health to the Minister for Health and Ageing, Ms Roxon, reaffirmed the Commonwealth's commitment to a policy of non-closure of existing hospitals and support for state decisions. The Commonwealth has always assumed that these decisions are based on a process of state-wide consultation, but in true Labor style we have not seen state-wide transparent consultation over the decision to close the Royal Children's Hospital. In recent polling on the issue, 84 per cent of respondents were unaware of the closure and 90 per cent were opposed to it. Maintaining the Royal Children's Hospital and the strength of a well-functioning Herston teaching hospital within the medical school complex is very important to the people of Brisbane.

Reckless spending and the proven inability to deliver programs under Labor means more reckless spending and its economic failures mean that funding for essential services is under threat from this plan. The coa-

lition supports the work that is being done, and can continue to be done, by the Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care but we hold serious concerns about this government's desire to establish a new stand-alone, self-serving bureaucracy that will move even further away from the patients they were designed to protect.

**Ms GRIERSON** (Newcastle) (7.37 pm)—As a nation it is fair to say that we stand at a crossroads. The decisions that we make here in this parliament will be critical if we are to build the sophisticated world-class health system necessary to meet the present and future needs of our ageing population.

The National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2010, which I rise to support, forms part of the most extensive and far-reaching reform of the health sector since the introduction of Medicare in 1984. It will deliver a health network for all Australians, funded nationally and run locally. We will become the dominant funder of hospital services, with full policy and funding responsibility for GP, primary health and aged care. We will also pay for 60 per cent of hospital activity and capital costs, as well as 60 per cent of teaching, training and research costs—costs which are ever-escalating.

We will use this increased funding responsibility to leverage greater coordination, control and accountability at a local level. There are savings and synergies to be found. That is our goal: to find those savings and synergies and make the health dollar go as far as it can. Combined with a new national performance framework, we will transform the health system, making it more transparent, to provide all Australians with improved access to high-quality health care—the one thing I think all Australians collectively strive for.

This bill establishes the framework for the Australian Commission on Safety and Qual-

ity in Health Care as part of the National Health and Hospitals Network. As a permanent, independent body under the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997, the commission will set national clinical standards, guidelines and indicators and strengthen clinical governance. It will foster safe and high-quality care, particularly in the areas of primary care and mental health. By reducing the occurrence of preventable errors, and healthcare costs stemming from unnecessary or ineffective treatments, the commission can go a long way to restoring the community's waning trust in the health system.

Australian Labor governments have a strong and proud history of investment in health and public hospitals. Almost three decades ago, under the Hawke Labor government, this nation stood up for the right of all Australians to protection against the crippling financial consequences of hospital and medical treatment. Now we are standing up again for the right of all Australians to better hospitals and better health care. Whether they live in regional or metropolitan Australia, this will be a health system for all Australians.

From 1 July this year we, as a government, began to deliver \$7.3 billion for the Australian health system over five years to ease the pressure on our hospitals and GPs. This is an increase in funding of over 50 per cent. It is designed to build the capacity of the Australian health system. We are working to better integrate hospitals with community health providers and general practitioners. That is one thing that my region excels in—integration and collaboration has proven a great driver for innovation and best practice in the Hunter New England Area Health Service. Nationally we have delivered more beds, more training and more GP services. But according to the member for Dickson, this Labor government 'is all talk and no

action'. Make no mistake, those opposite believe in a very different Australia. It would not be an Australia for all Australians, with a health and hospital network for the 21st century.

When he was the Minister for Health and Ageing under the previous government, the now Leader of the Opposition cut \$1 billion from public hospitals. Then in the lead-up to the recent election, he pledged to again cut funding for GP services, to cut the GP Super Clinics Program, to cut the e-health system and to cut the 24-hour, after-hours GP helpline. Under an Abbott-led government, we would have seen fewer doctors, fewer nurses, and fewer beds.

What it really comes down to is the question: who will put the health and wellbeing of Australians first? Who will support a national hospital network so that all Australians can enjoy affordable and universally accessible health care? Who will cut emergency department waiting times and who will fund more hospital beds? These are the questions that the Australian people are asking of us, asking this new parliament.

The question that those opposite face is whether they will support this reform package and help deliver a higher quality health and hospital system, or whether they will vote against this legislation, just as they have voted against our broader reform agenda. When they vote against more hospital beds and a national after-hours GP service, they do so not because they do not care but because, it seems, they just do not understand.

Almost a year ago, on 7 October 2009, with the then Minister for Indigenous Health, Rural and Regional Health and Regional Services Delivery, the Hon. Warren Snowdon, we conducted a consultation with the people of my electorate of Newcastle and the surrounding electorates of Charlton, Hunter, Shortland and Paterson. We asked the people

of Newcastle and the Hunter for their views, their experiences and their ideas, and we listened. It is some of those ideas that we are now attempting to implement through this legislation.

Since then a significant number of residents in my electorate have written to me about the state of the public health system and of the hospital system particularly. In my experience as a member of parliament, I never receive as many responses to surveys as I do when the survey is about health. Health care is something that is critical to every member of my electorate. Jean from New Lambton asked us to fix the lengthy delays in waiting lists. At the John Hunter Hospital, the waiting list for a gastroscopy and colonoscopy for diagnosis of, say, coeliac's disease with diabetes is one year. 'Imagine what could happen during a whole year', Jean said, 'waiting for the investigation and diagnosis of a potentially dangerous medical condition.' In December last year, cancer patients at the Calvary Mater Newcastle Hospital were having to wait for six to eight weeks to see an oncologist and a further 12 weeks before they could begin chemotherapy.

Our hospitals are getting busier each year and demand for quality health care is increasing as our population ages. The 2010 *Intergenerational report* has warned that an ageing population will strain the healthcare system and increase both healthcare needs and expenditure. The proportion of our population aged over 65 is forecast to increase from 14 per cent this year to 23 per cent by 2050 and we need to ensure that our health and hospital system is able to meet this increasing demand.

These reforms to our health and hospital system are long overdue. The Australian people have expressed their concerns, in my electorate and in electorates around Australia.

lia. We are committed to rectifying the \$1 billion shortfall in public hospital funding under the previous government, just as we are committed to training doctors and nurses for the future by reinstating the training positions that were cut by the previous Liberal led government. As a government, and as a party, we are committed to providing more beds, more training and more GP services. We will invest in better health and better hospitals for all Australians.

Vital to these reforms is the \$64 billion agreement with state and territory governments reached in November 2008. This is a 50 per cent increase on previous Australian government funding for public hospitals. The agreement included a \$1.1 billion health workforce package, \$750 million to take pressure off emergency departments and \$500 million for subacute care facilities. The government also invested \$872 million nationally in preventative health programs for schools, workplaces and local communities with a high incidence of chronic disease. Sadly, there are too many such communities. Chronic disease is rising, and last year in my electorate of Newcastle we provided almost \$200,000 to fund extra support for local patients with chronic diseases. If we are to have a truly national health and hospitals network, it is vital that we have strong safety and quality standards so that all Australians can be confident in the quality of the care that they are receiving, whether they are at the John Hunter Hospital in Newcastle or the Broken Hill hospital in far western NSW.

This has been the hallmark of the current government. We are a government for all Australians, and we will invest in the public health system in six key areas: by expanding the capacity of our hospitals through the National Health and Hospitals Network; by investing in our doctors and nurses with more training places and allied health scholarships; by building primary care infrastructure with

more GP superclinics and upgrades to existing general practices; by taking health records online through investments in e-health; by developing local hospital networks; and by funding health prevention in schools and in workplaces around the country.

Over the coming five years we will deliver 1,300 new subacute hospital beds. We will cap emergency department waiting times at four hours. Not so long ago I sat with my father in an emergency ward, having got back from Canberra at 6 pm to find he had been at the hospital since 10 o'clock in the morning. That is a long time to be waiting on a bed in an emergency ward. We will ensure that elective surgery is delivered in clinically recommended times for 95 per cent of Australians. We have already seen this government's commitment to reducing elective surgery waiting periods at the John Hunter Hospital, which services the residents of my electorate. Last year, the federal Labor government provided almost \$400,000 for new equipment in my electorate to improve elective surgery performance, as part of the Elective Surgery Waiting List Reduction Plan. Nationally, we have already delivered more than 62,000 additional elective procedures.

We also provided \$2.2 million to upgrade the PET scanner and services at the Calvary Mater hospital in Newcastle. I am pleased to say that the state government has this year installed an MRI machine at the Mater hospital, and I am working closely with the Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon, knowing that they will require some support for the operation of that MRI. The Calvary Mater hospital is the largest oncology service deliverer in New South Wales.

We also funded 50 new Commonwealth supported nursing places at the University of Newcastle to the value of \$564,000, as part of our commitment to reducing emergency

room waiting periods and improving the quality of health care. We have provided \$466.7 million over two years to establish the key components of a personally-controlled electronic health records system in Newcastle, to give back to patients ownership of their health records.

I am very pleased that Newcastle, through Hunter GP Access, is one of the regions to be part of that initial project. They have a great history of providing support for GP services and in Newcastle, where we have seen Primary Health Care close down an important medical practice at less than one day's notice, we have seen patients struggle to find or get access to their records. It has been very distressing for people who have been at a practice for a long time, so I know the value to patients of knowing that they can control their records and retain access to them. I am pleased that our region will be a part of that, and I have met with Mark Foster, the head of GP Access, and he has made a commitment that best practice will be followed. We have also allocated almost \$250,000 to the Hunter Dementia and Memory Resource Centre and funded after-hours GP access to the sum of \$6.7 million. I praise GP Access—we are using their model for after-hours service, which they have had for many years. It provides for a call centre and triage services. We have also provided more than \$2.6 million for Indigenous mental health programs in my electorate alone.

We are already delivering a health and hospitals network for the 21st century, and we will continue to deliver on our commitment to improving access to health services for all Australians. Supplemented by strong safety and quality standards, this bill will encourage confidence among the Australian people in the high-quality care that they should receive and deserve to receive. I commend this bill to the House, and I thank the Prime Minister and Minister Roxon for

their ongoing interest in the health concerns of the people of Newcastle over many years.

**Mr SECKER** (Barker) (7.51 pm)—Mr Deputy Speaker Sidebottom, may I add at this first opportunity my congratulations on your reappointment to the Speaker's panel. I am sure you will continue to do a great job, as you did during the last parliament. I rise tonight to speak on the National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2010. This bill is part of the Labor government's so-called answer to health reform announced by the former Rudd government as a distraction from things like the insulation debate. Like much of the legislation announced around that time, it lacks detail and common sense.

I am fully supportive of measures that improve frontline health services. There would not be a member in this House who would not want that improvement, especially if it is directed towards regional areas. My electorate of Barker is basically all rural and regional, and my constituents are always asking for improved health services—I am sure many other members of parliament would say the same. The problem here is that the legislation will not improve frontline health services in regional Australia. In fact, it would not even improve frontline health services in the city or anywhere else, and that is why I oppose this legislation.

When the Minister for Health and Ageing spoke about this bill recently in the House she said there was a need to increase capacity and to better connect care—what an interesting phrase that was. I would take that to mean that my constituents could see a doctor quicker, that local hospitals would not close down and that mental health would not be forgotten—but not so. I receive correspondence in my office all the time about health services, such as the long waiting times to see a doctor and especially the shortage of services in country towns.

Health is such an important issue for most people and they want to trust the government of the day when it comes to health. I know there are people who bought into the Labor government's promise of health reform hook, line and sinker. I feel sorry for those people because they will be bitterly disappointed as this bill seeks only to increase bureaucracy—it will not improve frontline health services, it will not give us better hospital services and it will not benefit my electorate.

This bill seeks to expand the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care and to create the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority. They are great bureaucracies but they do not deliver one health service. What is concerning is that the detail on expanding these authorities is not included in this bill. How can the Gillard government expect the coalition to stand in this place and pass legislation that has no detail? When the constituents of Barker call on me as their member I would rather tell them that I opposed this bill because I did not believe it delivered anything for them and that it lacked any detail on decent reform, than tell them I supported legislation that did not fully explain the intention of the bill.

I think it is quite amazing how health services in this country have actually gone in the last couple of decades. I am a great believer that nurses, for example, often did a great job when learning on the job, but that does not seem to happen now. They now have to get their university degrees and many of those people do not actually then deliver health services—they become health bureaucrats.

I think it is very interesting to look at the situation in Queensland. I am sure it is very similar all around the country but I know that in Queensland there are 19,000 doctors and nurses delivering health services. You would think that was pretty good, but there are ac-

tually 45,000 bureaucrats who are not delivering health services. I think one of the big problems in the health system in Australia is that we have become too bureaucratized and we are not actually delivering services.

The coalition cannot support this bill because it is wasted funding that could be better spent elsewhere. The coalition announced it would not proceed with funding for an independent and expanded commission, and that the funding would be used to offset the costs of the coalition's plan for real action on hospitals and nursing policy. The funding the Labor government announced for the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority and the National Performance Authority just makes the problem worse by adding more bureaucrats and not enough health deliverers.

Our plan, for which we were congratulated by the experts, was \$1.5 billion for mental health, in contrast to something like \$270 million from the Labor government. You cannot always judge a policy by the number of dollars expended, although that tends to be the way that the Labor government talks about these issues—it is spending this much on this and this much on that—but there is no doubt that we ticked all the boxes when it came to mental health policy.

I had health workers contact me and tell me they were very pleased that the opposition was serious about mental health. It is a huge and growing problem in rural areas, as you would know, Mr Deputy Speaker Sidebottom. They applauded our plan because it provided the services they needed—not more bureaucrats. This was what the people who work in the industry were telling me they needed. When the Gillard government decided to cut pivotal funding for mental health workers earlier this year I was stunned that a government could be so ruthless. Headspace is another vital service for youth and the Headspace sites in Barker were worried that

they would become obsolete. Again, we see a government not concerned with real effects and not giving us the details.

I would have thought that after those opposite saw the backlash to their cuts to mental health they would have learnt from that, but here we are in this place yet again debating more legislation that promises the world and delivers very little. If the Gillard government took time out to consult industry professionals and those workers in the system that see what happens on the ground, this would be a very different debate indeed. If you ask any hospital what they need they would not ask for more red tape or more bureaucrats; they would ask for better frontline services and better management. If I went to my constituents in Barker and asked if they would prefer to see the number of bureaucrats increased, I can guarantee you that that is not what they want.

I believe that better management of hospitals lies in community-run hospitals, not in the added bureaucracy and red tape that this bill would carry with it. The coalition supports better frontline services and better general practices. Community-run hospitals are run by the people that know best, not by bureaucrats that have no idea what the communities actually need. I spent four years on a hospital board and I know a bit about what works and what does not, and bureaucracy does not always work. We all know we need a certain amount of it, but I think we have gone too far in that direction.

Labor's reforms will not provide better services, and the delivery of services is the way we can actually judge what is happening in the sector. I have serious concerns about what these so-called reforms will mean and I ask the Gillard government to come forward and be honest about the detail of the legislation. I do not think the Minister for Health and Ageing has any idea what the detail is. I

think she is in the dark just as we are on this side when it comes to Labor's health reform. These reforms were promised by Kevin Rudd, the former Prime Minister, and were driven by a political agenda. He did not even both consulting the health minister. She was completely excluded from discussions. This is a totally compromised proposal.

While the Labor government are busy expanding their bureaucracy, hospitals are closing and patients are missing out on key health services. I draw the House's attention to an issue in my electorate of Barker where I think that funding could be better directed. I am sure people across South Australia, and possibly even interstate, are starting to hear about Keith and their hospital. Even though it is a small town, the residents are certainly making a lot of noise, as they should because their hospital is not only being ignored by Labor but being given a death sentence.

The problem is that the Labor state government have cut Keith's funding by 60 per cent. Could you imagine any hospital being able to continue to exist following a 60 per cent funding cut? On the basis of that cut this hospital will have to rely on their reserves and will only last another nine months. Residents are understandably upset and angry because after nine months they will have to travel 140 kilometres away to the nearest hospital when they have a perfectly good one in Keith already.

The hospital will be forced to close following the 60 per cent cut to their funding that was announced in the state budget. This is devastating news for the hospital and for the township. These cuts will be the end of the Keith hospital. It just cannot continue without funding. The state government unfortunately have been commenting in the media recently that the Keith hospital is a private hospital, as if it is a profit-making hospital. This is totally incorrect. It was built

in 1954 by the community for the community, not by the state government or the federal government. It was built by the community and it has remained outside the state government bureaucracy. I note with interest that in a state Labor government seat, the McLaren Vale hospital, another so-called private hospital under the same criteria that the minister has been talking about, receives 10 fully funded beds. Keith hospital is only asking that their three beds continue to be funded in the same way they have been for many years.

The other fallacy that the minister has been putting out there is that the Keith hospital pays more for its nurses—as if somehow the management of Keith hospital are not very good at managing their hospital. In actual fact that is not the case. The nurses get eight per cent less than nurses in the state hospital bureaucracy because the Keith nurses love their community hospital and they want it to keep going.

I believe the federal Labor government should take notice of this issue because the federal government have invested quite heavily in this hospital. Labor and Liberal governments have contributed \$1.3 million in total towards the Keith hospital, so it is in everyone's interests if the hospital stays open. I actually congratulated the Labor government for funding the Keith hospital again, like I did when it achieved some funding when the coalition were in government. Keith hospital are just about to open the wing after investing about \$800,000 in it. Guess what? It is going to have to close in nine months. How stupid is that? I would have thought that the federal minister would be very interested to know that all that federal taxpayers' money has been spent and yet, because of a state government decision, the hospital will have to close. It does not make sense for the government to invest in a hospital that benefits the community and

then let the hospital close while under their watch.

The Gillard government should display their interest in this hospital and ensure it does not meet an unfortunate end because of careless decisions. But I will give Minister Roxon credit because her department have met with me and on Thursday I will also be meeting with the Minister for Mental Health and Ageing, Mark Butler. I hope they are taking notice, because if the Keith hospital closes—and it will close within nine months if this funding is not at least kept at parity—there will not be a hospital for the 200 kilometres between Bordertown and Murray Bridge. I think the locals are talking about erecting signs as you leave Bordertown or Murray Bridge that will read, 'Please, don't get sick because there will not be another hospital for 200 kilometres.' This will be on the main highway from Adelaide to Melbourne, the Dukes Highway. There have been several deaths on that road, so it is just ludicrous to make a decision which will close this hospital. The Keith Hospital is the furthest hospital from which the rescue helicopter can retrieve patients without having to refuel on its way back to the Royal Adelaide Hospital. With the Dukes Highway running right past Keith this is very worrying.

I have listed the many concerns I have over the possible closure of Keith hospital, and I am not alone in my concerns. Twelve hundred people live in Keith and 1,200 came out to a public meeting last week, and they are demonstrating on the steps of the state parliament tomorrow. I wish them luck because this state government obviously does not understand the issue and it is about time that Labor started listening to the concerns of the local community.

**Ms O'NEILL** (Robertson) (8.06 pm)—I am delighted to speak today to this important bill, which puts in place the first piece of

Labor's historic health reform agenda, our National Health and Hospitals Network, and of course I oppose the amendment moved last night by the member for Dickson.

The National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2010 gives the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care the role of setting national clinical standards and strengthening clinical governance. Later amendments will include provisions to establish the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority and the National Performance Authority, other elements of the National Health and Hospitals Network.

Through his amendment, the member for Dickson seeks to create a legislative logjam. As we all know, all states and territories bar Western Australia have signed up to Labor's National Health and Hospitals Network Agreement. As the Prime Minister said in her recent press conference, we are going to keep talking to Western Australia. Notwithstanding that state's continued absence and the obstructionist behaviour of the member for Dickson, this week is a historic week in this parliament for Australia's healthcare system.

As the Prime Minister, the Minister for Health and Ageing and the Treasurer announced yesterday, the government will be introducing legislation this week to allow the Commonwealth, for the first time, to take majority funding responsibility for public hospitals and full responsibility for primary care. This legislation, should it win the backing of the parliament and clear the roadblocks put up by the likes of the member for Dickson, will ensure that, for the first time, the federal government fairly and transparently funds Australia's public hospitals, and that is a good thing.

For the first time, the Commonwealth will fund hospitals for each service they provide rather than through block grants. This will

allow us as a nation to address the burgeoning demand in regions like mine and help ease the pressure on our hospital waiting lists. I hope the opposition will support this historic legislation when it comes before this place. Hope springs eternal. Delay will only hurt those who need the boost to health services most—those who face longer waiting times in emergency departments and further elective surgery delays.

As the minister for health pointed out in her second reading speech, the bill in question today establishes, in the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care, a permanent, independent safety and quality body. This government is determined to drive improvements in quality and to safeguard high standards of care for all Australians. This is a key part of Labor's health reform agenda. We appreciate that Australians have a right to demand the consistent, high-quality care they deserve, wherever they live. That is true whether you are in Woy Woy or Wagga Wagga, Gosford or Goondiwindi.

I can bear witness personally to the expectations of the people in Woy Woy and Gosford because of the thousands of people I have spoken to over the last nine months on the Central Coast. Equity of access to health care is the biggest health issue for the people of my electorate. One Sunday afternoon, as I was out meeting people in Terrigal, I met a woman who had been blessed with good health. In fact, she had been so well that she had not been to the doctor for eight years. It sounded like a good news story to me, but she went on to tell me that in the previous week she had become unwell. When she returned to her former doctor—whom her husband and her daughter were seeing—she was told that the books were full and she was no longer eligible to be a patient. This was a story I heard over and over, particularly from new residents in the area.

While meeting people in Umina I met a lady who disclosed to me, in the most frank and generous way—which is something many of us find when we meet people in the community—that she had a urinary tract infection but could not get in to see her doctor for two weeks. The result was that she ended up as a triage level 5 patient at the emergency centre at Gosford Hospital. These are issues that only a Labor government is committed to addressing, which is part of the reason the support for Labor on the Central Coast was so strong. People understand that we have a plan that will increase equity and access.

Another GP superclinic for our region will certainly help meet the needs I have just articulated. There is already a GP superclinic underway in Warnervale and another one due to be built in Robertson. Last night we heard a lot of nonsense on GP superclinics from the opposition. This is a superior model of care. We acknowledge the work of local GPs and their efforts in their practices, but the GP superclinic model really does have the health consumer at the centre of it, and I urge GPs to embrace the model.

Over time, Labor's commitment to training more doctors and nurses will make a difference too: 1,000 extra nurses every year nationally and an additional 5½ thousand GPs and 680 specialist doctors over the next decade. Earlier this month the Prime Minister and the minister for health expanded on that announcement by allocating funding for clinical training for up to 12,000 more medical, nursing and allied health students. We are investing in the health system of the future for the future of all Australians.

My impressions of the overwhelming demand for health services on the Central Coast were forged by my extensive door-knocking across the region. Those impressions have been further reinforced in the

meetings I have had over the past few weeks with many Central Coast health providers: the area health service, the Central Coast Division of General Practice and a number of others. On the Central Coast, Labor is meeting that demand through the funding of a number of initiatives, such as the \$38.6 million regional cancer centre at Gosford Hospital. I was proud to be there on 14 April this year when the former Prime Minister announced the funding, \$28.6 million of which is being contributed by the Commonwealth.

There is much more. Earlier this month I had the pleasure of being at Gosford Hospital with New South Wales Premier Kristina Keneally for the announcement of \$1.6 million in funding to replace Gosford Hospital's cardiac catheterisation lab. The patient I spoke to was very pleased at the prospect of undergoing his procedure close to home.

I was also with the minister for health at Gosford Hospital back in August when she announced \$5 million in new beds and equipment. That means 16 new acute care beds and new emergency department equipment. I also obtained an insight into the future planning focus for Gosford Hospital, our region's main teaching hospital. Management there are looking at enhancing surgical capacity, including theatres, acute surgical models and day-only capacity; enhancing the capacity of the emergency department, including the paediatric area and an emergency medical unit; enhancing acute medical and surgical beds; enhancing intensive care capacity; and creating in-patient rehabilitation beds. These are ambitious plans to meet the pressing needs of the community, which has every right to expect the highest possible standards.

Labor is the only party that is addressing the real health needs of the Central Coast community. We are recognising particular needs in particular places. We are liberating

local voices by responding to what is actually needed on the ground. In contrast, during the previous election campaign the Liberals were shameless. They presented an uncosted, sham proposal to rebuild Woy Woy Hospital. What they proposed would barely have paid for a refit of the building. Like the entire coalition election campaign, this was nothing short of a confidence trick. I am pleased to say that the public on the Central Coast were not taken in. They know that they deserve better than that.

Our growing region deserves the best quality health care it can get. That is where the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care comes in. It will be the body that develops the standards that make up the new National Health and Hospital Network's performance and accountability framework. Having our own local health network—a key part of Labor's reforms—cannot come soon enough for the people of the Central Coast. There is a sense of pride and relief among those of us on the coast that this has finally come to pass.

I feel that the Central Coast is emerging from the shadow of its larger metropolitan neighbours to the north and to the south to cement its regional identity. It is something the member for Dobell and I talk about often. We have a population the size of Canberra. We have our own football team, the Central Coast Mariners, and we might even have a rugby league team, the Bears, in the near future. Soon we shall be unchained from the health bureaucrats of northern Sydney and we will have our own Central Coast area health service. If I may borrow from the words of Martin Luther King, I know there are many health providers and consumers on the Central Coast who are relishing the day that they can say, 'Free at last, free at last—thank God Almighty, we're free at last.'

I know the provision of health services across our collection of villages in Robertson will present a challenge to whichever body is charged with that duty, but being able to exercise some local control and having the case mix funding model working in our favour are two things I know the local health providers are also looking forward to. I am sure our local clinicians on the Central Coast will work constructively and cooperatively with the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care when it becomes operational to establish and ensure continuity of best practice clinical care. The commission is due to begin operations as a permanent independent body on 1 July next year.

This legislation will formulate the commission as a permanent statutory authority under the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act. It will have a board of directors with a chair and seven to nine other members with substantial experience or knowledge and significant standing in public administration in relation to health care. A chief executive officer will be responsible for the day-to-day administration of the commission.

I note that our parliamentary colleagues in the other place have already referred this bill to their Community Affairs Legislation Committee for scrutiny, with a report due on 18 November. I hope that health consumers across the country will have some certainty after that date. I note that funding of \$35.2 million has been set aside by the Commonwealth over the next four years for the commission to do its work. That funding will be augmented by funding from states and territories who are part of the National Health and Hospital Networks agreement. I commend the bill to the House and oppose the second reading amendment, which will simply create another unnecessary delay.

**Mr WYATT** (Hasluck) (8.18 pm)—I rise to speak against the National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2010 and to support the second reading amendment. I also want to congratulate you, Mr Deputy Speaker Sidebottom, on your appointment to your position as well. It is intriguing standing talking about this issue, given that recently I was a public servant heavily involved in the many facets of the national partnership agreements that were led by the Commonwealth and through the COAG processes that were to streamline both reporting, financial arrangements and the commitments to significant reforms across the continuum of health care provided to Australians. That included reforms around hospitals and the funding that would be required and the targets that were established in respect of elective surgery lists.

Some of those processes were negotiated through jurisdictions led by Commonwealth bureaucrats or, in many instances, by ministers supported through the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council. They included the National Healthcare Agreement. It includes Indigenous health, aged care, workforce, preventative health and the findings of the National Preventative Health Taskforce and, ultimately, the National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission. All of those documents and the work that led to the finalisation of the agreement meant that there was considered thinking around the types of services where the gaps were existing within all jurisdictions and the ways in which health care was provided to all Australians.

I saw great opportunity through both of these significant mechanisms of AHMAC, the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council, and the reform process that would mean that all Australians would enjoy a healthcare service that would meet their needs. Whilst I was campaigning there was a constant concern raised by Hasluck constitu-

ents about the evolving changes being proposed by the Gillard government and the translation of changes impacting on their families. Hasluck has two public hospitals—the Kalamunda District Community Hospital and the Swan District Hospital. The new Midland Health campus will replace the old Swan District Hospital, which has served the community for some considerable time and will be a critical hub of healthcare access for people within its area. It is long overdue. Its model will provide a range of services not available to my constituents in that area. At the southern end of Hasluck, the closest hospital is Armadale Kelmscott Memorial Hospital in the seat of Canning. As with all Australians, constituents want better health care and access to primary healthcare services.

In this new model of the way health is to be addressed, the GP superclinics were announced. A GP superclinic is to be built at Midland, adjacent to the new Midland hospital at the cost of \$10 million. It will provide a range of services and is co-funded by the state government and the Commonwealth government. There already exists within Midland, not far from the proposed site, a general practice that provides a good comprehensive service to the people of Midland.

These local GPs are well supported by the local area because the service they provide is of a high standard. The GP superclinic in Midland was not awarded to the local GPs even though they had an established practice which provided a range of services. In another part of my electorate, people living in the suburb of Gosnells have limited access to local GPs who bulk bill, which means that they can wait for up to a week in order to access a GP that will see them. This matter was raised regularly by constituents who I met whilst campaigning and to me it would have been the better place for a GP superclinic because it would have been much more accessible.

The current bill does not satisfy the needs of my constituents. In Hasluck there is a lack of specialised services such as pathology and radiology and, more importantly, mental health services, given the circumstances that young people find themselves placed in and the pressures that are brought to bear on families. I am in agreement that the Australian health system is in need of the reform that was foreshadowed within the national report, which states:

Australia's health system is in need of reform to meet a range of long-term challenges, including access to services, the growing burden of chronic disease, population ageing, costs and inefficiencies generated by blame and cost shifting, and the escalating costs of new health technologies.

Hasluck needs to benefit from these reforms. It continues:

By April 2008, the Commission will provide advice on the framework for the next Australian Health Care Agreements (AHCAs), including robust performance benchmarks in areas such as (but not restricted to) elective surgery, aged and transition care, and quality of health care—

so the collection of data and the rigour around that had commenced—

3. By June 2009, the Commission will report on a long-term health reform plan to provide sustainable improvements in the performance of the health system addressing the need to:

- a. reduce inefficiencies generated by cost-shifting, blame-shifting and buck-passing;
- b. better integrate and coordinate care across all aspects of the health sector, particularly between primary care and hospital services around key measurable outputs for health;
- c. bring a greater focus on prevention to the health system—

so that prevention was to become a hallmark in the way in which the health of Australians would go upstream to the front-end as opposed to relying on the care provided through tertiary hospitals—

d. better integrate acute services and aged care services, and improve the transition between hospital and aged care—

Certainly, within the dynamics of the electorate of Hasluck, that modelling and provision of service would meet the needs of the constituents. Further, it states:

- e. improve frontline care to better promote healthy lifestyles and prevent and intervene early in chronic illness;
- f. improve the provision of health services in rural areas;
- g. improve Indigenous health outcomes; and
- h. provide a well qualified and sustainable health workforce into the future

I would say with a high degree of confidence that not many of the constituents in Hasluck would have contributed to the consultation process for the national health reform agenda. However, all of those elements were encapsulated in the COAG reform process, led by Minister Roxon, the Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council and senior officers within both Commonwealth and state and territory jurisdictions. So the outcomes will lead us to the reforms that are being sought in this legislation without the legislation being required.

The National Health and Hospitals Reform Commission was established by the Rudd government in 2008 to assist the government in addressing a range of health related challenges. In that process consultation with the public sector was extensive. One of the elements is that:

The Government will introduce Local Hospital Networks to run small groups of hospitals, so that hospitals better respond to the needs of their local community. Local Hospital Networks will collaborate to provide patient care, manage their own budgets, and be held directly accountable for their performance.

This would mean that many Hasluck constituents will have limited involvement in shaping the services they need because they

do not have a hospital in the southern region, but those in the Midland area would have access to being involved in the establishment and in framing what is purported to be the direction we will take.

The other element that I want to have a look at is that the hospital networks will perform a function, but there already exists in many sections of every state and territory jurisdiction the types of governance frameworks that allow for community and consumer advice into the provision and shaping of services. There are models of clinical care that go to clinical governance that already exist. I find it unfathomable that we have to re-establish or duplicate another set of governing frameworks when states and territories have for some period of time been reforming, under the guidance of the national partnership agreements, the directions in which health should be taken. In the government's consultations many clinicians and local communities made it clear they do not feel they have the opportunity to be involved in decisions about the delivery of health services in their community, and they certainly wanted to have a greater say.

Let me say that the constituents that I represent feel strongly about what they need but do not get the opportunity to customise services within the electorate, and this legislation does not provide them with that opportunity to shape the types of services. The result is that services are not likely to be responsive to local needs and opportunities to improve clinical safety and quality will be lost through a national framework. I had the opportunity of contributing to the consultations of the reform agenda and I see this as a watershed of opportunity to shape and develop an approach in health that is far reaching, but I would like to see that led at the state and territory level. The Commonwealth have demonstrated in a number of initiatives that the implementation process cannot be

done by Canberra; it has to be done at the local level.

Tinkering at the edges will not deliver the healthcare reforms proposed. It will become another failure for Labor but, more importantly, it will fail to deliver the reform that has been promoted by the Gillard government. How the commission will make a difference to a person living in Hasluck who wants access to good-quality health care across the continent need still escapes me, particularly the person who is on a waiting list. I suspect the impact would be very little.

When I looked through section 9 and I looked at the functions of the act, I saw that many of those functions that are promoting both accountability and reporting are already being done by the Department of Health and Ageing, a highly competent organisation that has been established for a long period of time. The analysis of reports is undertaken by other institutions. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare provides annual reports on the activities within the health arena. To establish another body or set of bodies requires funding to be directed away from frontline services. I see that it will add another layer to the way in which health is administered and the way in which negotiations will occur.

The principles of the partnership agreements go to primary responsibility for health service delivery and the legislation gives the responsibility alignment between the states and territories and Commonwealth. It focuses on improving the health and wellbeing of Australians. It focuses on coordinated federal action, accountability, financial support and greater incentives for economic and social reform. So the act does not require undertaking that role when we already have mechanisms in place.

The provision of the act proposes to ensure Australians will enjoy the benefits of a

nationally unified and locally controlled healthcare system which guarantees that Australians enjoy world-class health care and universal access to health care that has merit. This would be supported with enthusiasm by the constituents of my electorate of Hasluck. What I do not want to see is the three bodies established and the funding being directed at the establishment of those to the exclusion of the provision of frontline services. I think some of the challenges that we have with this legislation is that there are already existing structures, that there are already existing mechanisms and that those functions and the constitutional related requirements referred to in the bill are in place now and do have the opportunity of having the level of impact.

Western Australia certainly has not signed up to the agreement, because it does not wish to relinquish its GST and to have the Commonwealth manage and control that money and that allocation. It does not want to see a reduction in its share of the GST. To reach a state of complete mental and social wellbeing as an individual group we must be able to realise the aspirations to satisfy needs to change or cope with the health environment. That is a choice that people need to make within the context of the choices that they will want to establish in conjunction with their state and territory governments. In conclusion I want to finish by using these words from *Rethinking the Future* by Peter Senge:

Those that succeed will, I believe, have unique advantages in the twenty-first century, because they will harness the imagination, spirit and intelligence of people in ways that no traditional authoritarian organisation ever can—

or authoritarian legislation ever can.

**Mr LYONS** (Bass) (8.33 pm)—The National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2010 is a historic bill providing an opportunity for the removal of cost shifting and the blame game, with the focus to be clearly aimed at service delivery. I would like to

have it placed on the public record that I am a strong supporter of the Gillard Labor government's health reforms; that is, the implementation of local health and hospital networks—the most significant reforms to Australia's health and hospital system since the introduction of Medicare. For the first time in our nation's history, our hospitals will be funded nationally and run locally, with decision making at the local level.

Local health and hospital networks are a perfect model for Tasmania's three regions, with one network in each of those three regions. Some of you may not be aware of or familiar with the idea that, although Tasmania is relatively small in size geographically, there are three distinct regions—the South, the North and the North-West, including the West Coast—all three regions having different needs and requirements for health services and delivery.

There has been much discussion in Tasmania, including my electorate of Bass, about the best model for health reform and service delivery in the state. It is vital that Tasmania has three local health and hospital networks that are run at the local level. I cannot emphasise enough how important it is for hospitals and health to be run at the local level. I worked at the Launceston General Hospital for 17 years and can see how far reaching the benefits this model of management will be for the delivery of health services in Bass. I worked as a manager of a small country hospital until the Tasmanian Liberals sacked the boards.

I then worked under a regional structure until, again, the Liberals sacked the regional boards. I then worked under a state model which disempowered the local providers, divided service delivery and created silos of power, which increased costs and created greater queues. At that time the Liberals subscribed to the theory 'if you cannot manage

restructure and some people will think you are doing something'. The statewide plan isolated services and governments, in their ignorance, even split services to different ministers. It is possible for some primary or community services to close their books as they run out of budget. It is impossible for emergency departments to close their doors.

In Northern Tasmania services are gradually moving back to a regional model. In my opinion, all services should be in the one funding model, a single funder, so that the best care is the overriding aim. The only way to save money in health and community services is to do it right and to do it early. The regional model is the best fit for Tasmania. It is the model that works. It is the model that the community wants and it is the model that best suits Tasmania's population and culture. The management structure for the health and hospital networks needs to be flat, with medicolegal, accounting and management expertise mostly available from within the system at present.

The reporting system needs to be one which provides the same information to the federal government as to the state government so that duplication and reporting is not the focus of activity but is merely a method of reporting outcomes. The state governments and the Australian government must agree on activity and contract the local network to complete that activity. That way the focus will be on activity with smart reporting not lengthy reporting.

In the past a funding model I call bucket funding has prevailed. This is where a bucket of funding is provided to the health and hospital providers, and then they are required to meet the activity demand from that bucket. The new hospital and health funding will link activity to the true cost and focus on services not on who will pay. The cost-shifting will be at an end as a result of these

changes. Politicians have not been good at saying that a condition which will not get worse in four years will never be undertaken in our public hospital system. We should be honest. Some people with those conditions have waited in the false hope of a procedure when it is known that more urgent procedures will bump the less urgent. The funding through the National Health and Hospitals Network should eliminate cost-shifting with the budget activities agreed by the Australian government and the states. The funding should then follow that activity.

After a visit to Victoria in the early nineties I learned that Victorian hospitals were creating private clinics so they could bulk-bill the Commonwealth for services formerly provided by the states. Tasmania, soon after my return, commenced private clinics in our public hospitals so that patients could be bulk-billed, which was a cost-shift to the Commonwealth.

I have been around long enough to remember that Professor Rob Fassett was told by the then head of the state health department that no renal dialysis would be done outside of Hobart. Professor Bernie Einoder AM, who is to be congratulated for his recent elevation to life membership of the Australian Orthopaedic Association, after completing the first arthroscopic procedure in a public hospital in Australia was told by the Hobart bureaucracy that arthroscopic procedures would never catch on. These are just some blatant examples of where local input is vital to the delivery of health services.

The local health and hospital networks will receive funds and will be responsible for making decisions on the day-to-day management of hospitals and health within their networks. That means local services will be more responsive to local needs and that local health and hospital networks will be directly accountable for their own performance. The

health and hospital reforms will mean that doctors and nurses who work locally will have a greater say in how the local health and hospital systems are run, which is vital input to the delivery of effective health services. Governance and management of local health and hospital services will be run at the local level, increasing local autonomy and flexibility, which will mean that services will be more responsive to local needs.

The Labor government is committed to ending the blame game and to ending the cost-shifting that has plagued our health system for decades. Under this bill better access to services through GP superclinics, expanded GP services including after-hours service and assistance with infrastructure, which will develop training positions for the full range of primary care, will all be integrated into the local area networks. The government will also establish personally controlled electronic health records. This will mean that patients will have their full and accurate medical history, thus making it easier for patients travelling interstate. This will also reduce mistakes and ensure that doctors have all the information they need and with the patient's consent. The system will also be more transparent, and it will mean that strong performance can be identified and replicated in other areas.

The Gillard Labor government is committed to health reform and to the development of a nationally consistent approach for the delivery of healthcare services in Australia. The National Health and Hospitals Network is the model that best suits the community and its needs. Better health and hospitals means better health for all Australians. I commend the bill to the House.

**Mrs MARKUS** (Macquarie) (8.42 pm)—The National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2010 was claimed by the Minister for Health and Ageing to be:

... a key step forward in the government's health reform agenda.

This seems such high praise for a reform that, on the bill before us, will only deliver more bureaucracy, more cost, less accountability, no new hospitals, no new beds, no salary increases for nurses and no plans to increase doctor numbers. In its current form this bill does not address the crisis in our public hospitals and health support services. But that is typical of Labor. Just look at the BER, the home insulation scheme, the failure to rein in the banks and the failure to keep the cost of living to manageable levels for families, pensioners and small businesses.

The bill establishes the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care as a permanent independent statutory authority and will move it out of the Department of Health and Ageing to become a standalone authority. Since 2006, when the commission was established under the previous coalition government, it has played an important role in the Australian health system: by leading and coordinating improvements in safety and quality in health care in Australia through identifying issues and policy directions and recommending priorities for action; by disseminating knowledge and advocating for safety and quality; by reporting publicly on the state of safety and quality including performance against national standards; by recommending national datasets for safety and quality and working within multilateral government arrangements for data development, standards, collection and reporting; by providing strategic advice to health ministers on best-practice thinking to drive quality improvement including implementation strategies; and by recommending nationally agreed standards for safety and quality improvement.

There have been advances made in areas such as clinical handover and infection control as a result of the work of the commis-

sion. The coalition does support an ongoing role for the commission within existing resources, but we hold serious concerns about this government's capacity to efficiently and effectively implement its supposed health reform agenda.

We are concerned that the government also intends to create an independent hospital pricing authority at a cost of \$91.8 million and a national performance authority costing \$109.5 million. Other bodies proposed to be established in the bill include Medicare Locals, at \$416.8 million; state based funding authorities, with the cost unspecified; local hospital networks, again with the cost unspecified; and a national funding authority with the cost unspecified and, since, questionable. That is the Labor government's answer to the crisis in health and hospitals—more red tape, more jobs for the boys and more cost.

The coalition opposes this bill in its current form. We oppose it for a variety of reasons. It is claimed that the reform is a national reform, yet it still does not have national agreement, with Western Australia the most notable omission from the signatories. The solid support of the Labor states in the heady days of the former Prime Minister, 'the buck stops with me' Mr Rudd, is starting to unravel as the states look seriously at the funding arrangements and the absence of guarantees that infrastructure, resources and services will or can be delivered.

Some of the states must feel sicker than the health system, for, instead of 30 per cent of states' GST being quarantined by the Commonwealth, as first proposed, the 2011-12 budget estimates show that for some jurisdictions it will be up to 49 per cent of their GST income stream. That is serious money, and I am sure that there are major doubts about having the money go into bureaucracy instead of into other family and community

based services which would benefit from extra funding.

The partnership agreement shows that clinicians on the governing councils will not be working within the local hospital network. This means they will not be able to participate in the governance of local hospital networks, and it is not clear what role they will have on decision making and resource allocation.

The bill is short on the detail of how it will deliver services to people forced to wait for operations, the people who spend 10 hours in emergency departments waiting for a broken leg to be put in plaster or women forced to have their babies on the side of the road. These are all examples of challenges for people in the electorate of Macquarie. But it does say in section 10(2) that the commission must consult with clinicians, department heads of all states, the ACT and the Northern Territory, people deemed to be stakeholders and members of the public. That is to be commended. An added qualifier in section 10(3) says:

If the Commission is of the opinion that:

- (a) there is an urgent need to formulate particular standards, guidelines or indicators ... the Commission is not required to comply with subsection (2) ...

In other words, if the commission cannot find a reason not to consult it does not have to—independent indeed, but not in the way the taxpayers of Australia would want.

Another source of concern is that under the health reform proposals GP surgeries will lose \$58 million in practice incentive payments for after-hours patient care. Even a casual observer would see that this has the potential to impact on the viability of general practices to deliver services outside normal opening hours, critical to areas like the Blue Mountains and the Hawkesbury. In Macquarie many health and hospital services

have already been reduced. Where will people go when they have a medical or health emergency or need treatment out of hours?

But isn't this the same bill that the health minister lauded as a 'key step forward in providing better health and better hospitals'? Isn't this the same bill that the former Prime Minister, Mr Rudd, was referring to when he declared that when it came to fixing the health system of this country the buck stopped with him? By any reasonable analysis of the bill in its current form, the buck does not stop with him or this government but keeps flowing into a black hole called Labor government health reform.

The coalition has a plan to stop the flow of wasted money. The coalition has already announced that it would not proceed with funding for an independent and expanded commission. Instead, the money would be used to offset the costs of the coalition's plan for real action on hospitals and nursing policy. In addition the coalition has announced that the funding for the Independent Hospital Pricing Authority and the National Performance Authority would be used to offset a real action plan for better mental health. That is better value for taxpayers' money. That is a better use of funding and it will deliver services where they are really needed.

The coalition is much better at handling taxpayers' money than the wasteful, reckless Labor government, who embarked on a spending spree unseen in this country before. This is a government that has turned a \$20 billion surplus into a \$41 billion deficit and is paying around \$4.2 million in interest on net debt this year. We have massive debt and deficit under this Labor government, yet they have put up this bill, a bill that will increase public debt with no detail or guarantees that it will deliver real services and support for health and hospitals. This government is ad-

dicted to spending and is not delivering what the Australian public want, need and deserve.

I am certain the Australian people can ill afford another three years of reckless spending and failed policies. The coalition's plan for action on hospitals and nursing would have taken pressure off the public system and made a real difference by directly tying increased funding to delivery of increased services. We support a community controlled public hospital system by transferring managerial decision making from centralised bureaucracies to community boards. We believe in transparent and accountable governance and have proposed arrangements that give rural and small hospitals appropriate loadings and block grants to ensure their ongoing viability. Teaching and research hospitals will also receive loads to reflect the added responsibilities of their staff and infrastructure needs.

We committed 2,800 new public hospital beds compared to Labor's 1,300. We also have plans for professional development for nurses, scholarships for rural and regional nurses and annual bonuses for nurses who choose to practice in remote regional towns that have no resident medical practitioner. We have also developed policies that would address investment in health and medical research, and information and compliance programs, to improve rates of informed financial consent. The coalition's plans are real reforms that would have begun to address the practical needs of the Australian's health system.

If the minister is genuinely concerned about introducing genuine, effective reforms, perhaps she would like to adopt some of the coalition's policy. I urge the minister, if she is serious about reform, to adopt the amendments that the coalition put forward to improve this reform.

I support the amendment put forward by my coalition colleague, the Hon. Peter Dutton, the member for Dickson.

**Mr MURPHY** (Reid) (8.52 pm)—I am very pleased to take this opportunity to speak on the National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2010 this evening. As the Labor government has made clear since being elected in 2007, health is a national priority. I am astounded by the contribution of some of the opposition members, none of whom mentioned the fact that it was the Howard government that ripped out a billion dollars from our hospitals during its time in government. Of course, they are silent on that fact in a monumental triumph for hypocrisy and double standards. Further, I am extremely disappointed with the notion that Australians should not expect improvements in the health system such as a national standard of quality. Why? Australians should be confident when they attend any public hospital around the country that they will receive high-quality care. Moreover, the improvements proposed by the historic health and hospital reforms build on many other measures already introduced by the Gillard government.

It might be useful to remind the opposition about particular measures that the government has already implemented or announced for the improvement of our health system. This is not an exhaustive list, but I will just point out a few for the edification of opposition members. There is nothing more important than the health of our family and friends, and that is why the government is undertaking the most significant health reforms since the introduction of Medicare.

Under the National Health and Hospitals Network reform, in a historic move, the federal government will take majority funding responsibility for our public hospitals, ending a decade-long blame game. The Gillard

government recognises that Australians expect affordable, accessible and quality health care. For too long, the responsibility and accountability for health care have been used as a political football at the expense of certainty for our communities.

The Gillard government is introducing legislation and reforms for our health system to secure better health and hospital services across Australia. In addition to providing 100 per cent of funding for GP and primary healthcare services, our government will fund 60 per cent of every public hospital service provided to public patients as well as fund 60 per cent of recurrent expenditure on research, training costs and capital expenditure for our public hospitals. This funding shift will end the blame game and provide financial sustainability for our health system and the hospitals. The NHHN will be funded nationally but run locally, and this will mean that the care provided will reflect the type of care needed in our local areas.

We are enhancing capacity and integrating healthcare services. We seek to improve access to services, promote preventative health measures and ensure the sustainability and quality of health care. The bill we are debating tonight is a key part of our health and hospitals reform and relates more specifically to the government's intent to improve the quality of health care in Australia—

*Mr Sidebottom interjecting—*

**Mr MURPHY**—and the member for Braddon understands that clearly. The National Health and Hospitals Network Agreement between the Commonwealth and the states—except Western Australia—and territories provides that the National Health and Hospitals Network will have a new performance and accountability framework. The standards developed by the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care will form part of this new framework.

Contained in this bill is the framework to establish the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care as an independent statutory authority under the Commonwealth Authorities and Companies Act 1997. The commission has been operating within the Department of Health and Ageing, but the bill will ensure that the commission will be established as a permanent and independent agency and expand its role. It is expected that the continuation of the commission and the expansion in its role as an independent national safety and quality body will help identify and reduce preventable errors and unnecessary and ineffective treatments and improve the quality and safety in our health system.

Through consultation with clinicians and relevant parties, including the consumers, the commission will formulate and monitor quality and safety standards. The commission will also provide advice to the Commonwealth, state and territory health ministers concerning national clinical standards. However, it will be the local hospital networks that will implement relevant national clinical standards once the standards are agreed to. Through its work, the commission will help improve community trust in the quality and safety of our health system.

The bill also outlines the establishment and role of the board of the commission. The commission will consist of a board of directors, a chief executive officer, expert committees and consultants and the commission staff. The functions of the commission as prescribed in the bill include the promotion, support and encouragement of the arrangements, programs and initiatives relating to healthcare safety and quality matters; collecting, analysing, interpreting and disseminating information relating to healthcare safety and quality matters; formulating standards, guidelines and indicators; advising and reporting on safety and quality across health

settings; monitoring the implementation and impact of standards and guidelines for healthcare safety and quality; formulating model national accreditation schemes that provide for accreditation of organisations that provide healthcare services; and promoting, supporting, encouraging, conducting and evaluating training and research for purposes in connection with the commission's other functions.

I have been listening to the debate this evening, and I note that some of the members of the opposition have raised concerns that compliance with the national standards and guidelines formulated by the commission is voluntary. However, it is also important to record that the guidelines or standards may be made a term or condition of a grant or under a contract, and it may also be the case that the standards may be applied or adopted by a state or territory law or even a Commonwealth law.

The establishment of the Australian Safety and Quality Commission in Health Care is a major component of the Gillard government's health reform agenda which will ensure we provide the Australian public with safe, high-quality health care irrespective of where they live. The commission will set safety and quality standards, guidelines and indicators, consulting with medical professionals and consumers to deliver improvements in health care.

The federal government is already making significant improvements to our health system, particularly in my electorate of Reid. I am very pleased to note that the electorate of Reid has many wonderful health facilities, not least of all two of the busiest hospitals in Sydney—Concord Repatriation General Hospital and Auburn Hospital. I know that these hospitals have already received federal funding of more than \$8 million this year. Only last Friday \$2 million in funding was

announced for health services in Auburn. Both Auburn Hospital and St Joseph's Hospital in my electorate received funding under the historic Commonwealth-state health reforms, delivering better resources for doctors and patients in my community.

Auburn Hospital has received \$330,000 for new medical equipment including a defibrillator, a slit machine to help diagnose eye problems, and an ECG machine for recording patients' heart activity. The hospital will also purchase bariatric lifting equipment as well as anaesthetic monitors and equipment, specialised ear, nose and throat equipment, an ultrasound machine and a Neuro monitoring system.

The New South Wales Deputy Premier and Minister for Health, the Hon. Carmel Tebbutt, stated last Friday that Auburn Hospital carries out 5,000 surgical procedures a year and is known for providing emergency, maternity, paediatric, radiology and outpatient services. The ultrasound and ECG equipment has already been put to good use. I have no doubt that the other medical and surgical equipment will serve the hospital well and is welcomed by my electorate. On top of that, the Deputy Premier also announced on Friday that federal funding under the health agreement would provide \$1.8 million for six subacute neuropsychiatric beds at St Joseph's Hospital, also located in Auburn.

St Joseph's Hospital is known for its care of around 950 patients a year, serving the public with medical rehabilitation, aged care rehabilitation, palliative care and aged care psychiatry. The funding will provide specialist care for patients with functional, cognitive, behavioural or physical conditions, and facilities are expected to be operational by mid next year. I welcome this funding especially in light of calls from my constituents to boost funding for mental health services. I

know that this announcement is also warmly welcomed by those constituents.

The funding announcement last Friday for health services in Auburn builds on the improvements to my local hospitals already announced in July this year at Concord Repatriation General Hospital. Concord hospital received \$6.3 million for 16 new beds and medical equipment under the historic COAG health agreement. Mr Deputy Speaker Scott, I know you are familiar with Concord Repatriation General Hospital, being a former Minister for Veterans' Affairs. Concord is one of the busiest hospitals in the Sydney region with over 30,000 people treated in its emergency department every year. It conducts more than 11,900 surgical procedures and also provides more than 290,000 outpatient services. What a record!

I have a long history of supporting the services and research centres at Concord hospital. I know how important the work done at that hospital is for my community and it is appreciated. Of the \$6.3 million, \$5.9 million will provide nine subacute beds for the rehabilitation ward, six subacute beds for palliative care and one intensive care bed. Almost \$500,000 was provided to the hospital for new medical equipment including an electrocardiogram machine, cardiac monitoring equipment, ventilators, burns surgery equipment, sterilising equipment and a duress alarm system for the emergency department. The funding means many local families can receive these important health services close to home. It is important funding that provides real and lasting benefits for the people in my electorate of Reid.

This is yet another example of how the Gillard government is working with the states and territories to end the blame game and make a real difference. The new beds and equipment make a positive difference to the delivery of health services provided to

my local community and the working environment of our health care professionals. The work of our doctors and nurses is so important and the new equipment and extra beds provided by the federal funding will aid them in their very important roles, and help the delivery of health services in my area.

There is no doubt that the federal government recognises the call from Australians to improve the capacity and quality of our health system. I feel it is extremely important to note that the health reforms that the Labor government is working hard to implement are long-term reforms. We are not trying to introduce Band-Aid solutions to a vital public need. We on this side of the House are trying to provide a nationally unified and locally controlled health system that is accessible, sustainable and of the highest quality. Australians deserve nothing less.

The Minister for Health and Ageing, the Hon. Nicola Roxon, has had the very big task of implementing these reforms and she has repeatedly reminded the opposition that we are planning and preparing for the future. These reforms are a long-term investment in better care and better access for Australians now and in the future. This bill is one of the key components of the National Health and Hospitals Network reform, establishing the permanent and expanded role of the Australian Commission for Safety and Quality in Health Care. The introduction of new national standards for our public hospital services will ensure patients receive timely and high-quality services.

This is an opportunity for the opposition to support historic health reform for the benefit of all Australians. It is an opportunity for the opposition members to show that they too are supportive of more efficient, sustainable, high-quality health care and hospital system. They, like we, are interested in reducing waiting times in emergency depart-

ment and elective surgery lists. I hope that the opposition will not agitate to block or delay these reforms for the sake of political mileage. I know in my electorate of Reid we have welcomed recent funding announcements about our public hospitals and, indeed, previous federal funding for research facilities too. However, my constituents have also continued to call for further improvements and investments in our health and hospital system in light of the inadequate funding arrangements that they have suffered in the past. The Gillard government is working in the honest pursuit of better health and hospital care and I commend the Minister for Health and Ageing for her efforts. (*Time expired*)

**Ms MARINO** (Forrest) (9.07 pm)—Health delivery in Australia effectively means managing a \$100 billion a year business. That is what it is. I was interested in listening to the comments about a ‘sustainable quality health system’. I am afraid that, given this Labor government’s history of wasted billions and billions of dollars and the mess and mismanagement of programs, ranging from their incapacity to give away pink batts, to green loans, to school buildings in Labor states, I have absolutely no confidence in their capacity to manage a national health system.

At Federation in 1901, the newly adopted Constitution gave the Commonwealth government responsibility for defence and for border protection against both human invaders and diseases. It took another eight years, however, until 1909, to actually establish a federal quarantine service, and the role of border protection appears still to be one the present government is seriously struggling with 109 years later.

In the Constitution, the states and territories sought to retain control of what they considered internal issues, including health.

Prime Minister Billy Hughes appointed the first director general of the Commonwealth Health Department, a Dr J. Cumpston, who made the aim of the department that of 'positive health, freedom from all illness and disability for every human unit in the community'. Here we are 85 years later and where do we find the health debate? We find a federal Labor government struggling with the delivery of health services to the Australian community and also struggling to deliver its election promises.

It is a government without a genuine commitment, unfortunately, to mental health outcomes. It is a government that promised to fix hospitals by mid-2009 and promised to deliver 36 so-called GP superclinics, only three, or perhaps four, of which are open at this point. It promised to recruit 7,750 hospital nurses—1,000 of them were promised in 2008 alone, yet only 617 were recruited over a two-year period. The government promised to recruit 1,000 nurses for aged care and only 139 were actually recruited. The list simply goes on and on. And of the billions and billions of dollars that were splashed around in the stimulus packages, not one cent went to our health system.

The aim of our modern health system should not have changed from the honourable target set by Dr Cumpston in 1921, that of positive health and freedom from all illness and disability for all. And the way we can deliver this has not changed: by working efficiently and effectively, with goodwill and genuine intent, with the states and territories. I am seriously concerned that a government that could not deliver, as I said, an effective pink batts program or simply deliver computers in schools is asking the Australian people to trust them to deliver a national \$100 billion health program. It makes me shudder just to think about it. It is a program that will involve the development of what will undoubtedly be Labor's latest federal

bureaucracy. The minister in her second reading address on the National Health and Hospitals Network Bill 2010 said:

The Commonwealth will also become the dominant funder of Australia's public hospitals, paying 60 per cent of hospital activity and capital costs ...

Given that the actual funding is being taken straight out of state budgets, this is actually sleight of hand by the Labor Government—more smoke and mirrors and more spin—which effectively strips states of 30 per cent of their GST funding. This is why the Western Australian state government has not signed up to the agreement and shows no sign of doing so.

The WA government is very rightly concerned that a purportedly unified national system would once again leave the isolated West under-funded and under-served. We in WA are well aware that this government sees our state as a cash cow. We only have to look at the original version of the resources super profits tax and its current successor, the minerals resource rent tax, to see two examples. The Gillard government clearly sees the state of Western Australia as a source of additional tax and little more, so it is no wonder the Labor Party has performed so poorly in the West.

We can deliver a better health and hospital system. In my electorate of Forrest in the 1990s, local health services had local boards of management comprised of volunteers from the local communities. You would understand this, Mr Deputy Speaker—local people who volunteered their time to protect and enhance the health services in their local communities. That is how much they genuinely cared for their community's health delivery. Unfortunately, in 2001 an incoming WA Labor government—yes, a Labor government—sacked all these boards in line with Labor's centralist and anti-community-

control agenda. The WA Labor Party followed the Labor mantra of less community input and more government and bureaucratic control. There is a bit of a pattern here.

The result of this has, in many instances, been the downgrading of services across local districts as community health services lost their local champions—the people who had fought to maintain their local services. I believe that community control is better than bureaucratic control, particularly if that bureaucracy is here in Canberra. I want to see health boards re-established—boards of community champions who once again will work overtime to strongly represent, protect and enhance health services in their areas. Will the government's proposed local hospital networks perform these functions? The name, which seems to limit actions to hospitals only and not allow for action on other allied and primary health services, is also not encouraging. It actually suggests a breakdown of coordinated health service delivery by producing separate lines of administration.

The bill before the House identifies separate primary healthcare organisations independent of local hospital networks. We need to provide coordinated health care that crosses the boundaries of hospital, allied, primary and aged health care and regional health services, not hospitals in isolation from primary health care.

We also need to address the issue of activity based funding. This has been a relatively successful model in many areas, but rural and regional health services must be very seriously and carefully considered in the equation. As we know, it is often far more expensive to provide health services in regional and remote areas, but that does not mean that those services should not be provided in regional areas simply because it might be cheaper to deliver them in a re-

gional or capital city. The additional costs associated with health provision to a remote site like, say, Mildura, 540 kilometres from Melbourne, cannot be equated with the additional cost of remote health service delivery to a tiny town like Halls Creek, 2,800 kilometres from Perth.

Expenditure on health across Australia, in total cost and as a percentage of GDP, continues to expand. As I said, it is a \$100 billion business and I believe that a government that cannot run a \$2.45 billion home insulation scheme to give away pink batts will certainly not be able to manage a \$100 billion health system.

**Mr NEUMANN** (Blair) (9.16 pm)—E-health, primary infrastructure, GP superclinics, telehealth, national prevention policies—all were on the hit list of those opposite. Let them not come into this place with their sanctimonious sentiment—every single one of those things is a policy they would not support. The honourable member for Forrest did not mention that. She knows very well, as do those opposite, that when the Howard coalition was in government—and the Institute of Health and Welfare belled the cat in October 2007—the proportion of health and hospital funding in this country declined. Their record in health and hospital funding is appalling. They are the ones who capped the GP training places—Michael Wooldridge did that when he was the health minister back in 2004.

It behoved us when we came to government to put a huge amount of money into emergency service relief across the whole country. We have massively increased funding to the health and hospital system, and the National Health and Hospitals Network Bill is part of our overall strategy to alleviate the problems we inherited from the Howard coalition government. This is about putting the money back into the system; this is about a

national approach. This is not about anachronistic hospital boards; this is about making sure we have health networks, it is about Medicare Locals and it is about injecting real money into regional and rural health services across the country. It is not about some phoney policies that the coalition came up with just before the election which would have ripped hundreds of millions of dollars out of health and hospital funding across the country. They made phoney promises to spend the phoney money allocated through the phoney commitments they made based on the big black hole that they had in their costings. I did not believe, and I do not think people in the electorate of Blair believed, the commitments made by those opposite in health and hospital funding.

We know that as part of the National Health and Hospitals Network we will see Medicare Locals. I have had meetings with the Ipswich and West Moreton Division of General Practice to talk about the future. They are very enthusiastic about the Medicare Locals in our area. I have had meetings with rural hospitals, doctors and allied health professionals in my area to discuss the hospital networks that we are bringing in. Again they are supportive of what we are doing. I have written dozens of letters in support of applications for funding sought by GP practices across the Ipswich and West Moreton area in support of our primary infrastructure funding—\$300,00 for one lot; a possible \$500,00 for other important infrastructure such as medical clinics across the area. The people of the Ipswich and West Moreton region also support the idea of a GP superclinic like the one currently operating at the University of Queensland, run by UQ Health Services.

This legislation is important because it is part of the overall framework for the health and hospital system that we are bringing in. It is important legislation because it estab-

lishes the Australian Commission on Safety and Quality in Health Care. It is important legislation because this commission will set national clinical standards and strengthen clinical governance. The agreement provides real accountability and transparency. A performance and accountability framework will be established, and we think also, because the commission is established in a very sensible way with a board of directors, a CEO, expert committees and consultants and commission staff, the commission will have the capacity to monitor national standards and work with clinicians to identify what is best for clinical care for the Australian public, including what services should be delivered in which particular areas. We also want to make sure that the networks have local people involved as well. That is why the legislation is important.

This bill legislates not just for the establishment of the Australian Commission for Safety and Quality in Health Care as a new independent statutory body; it forms part of a framework for our overall strategy on health and hospitals. The legislation was talked about in detail by the Minister for Health and Ageing in her second reading speech on 29 September 2010. She made the point that the federal Labor government's health reforms, which she is responsible for in her ministerial capacity, are the most significant changes to Australia's health and hospital system since the introduction of Medicare. I concur.

My electorate is the fastest growing region in South-East Queensland and has long suffered by not having enough doctors and allied health professionals. This particular region warmly welcomes things like the GP superclinic. Why would the local newspaper, the *Queensland Times*, editorialise about how important that GP superclinic is to the people of the Ipswich and West Moreton region? That particular clinic provides services such as urgent care and it deals with people who

cannot get in to see the after-hours clinic at the Ipswich General Hospital, which receives federal funding of \$100,000. I commend the Ipswich and West Moreton Division of General Practice for their assistance in running that clinic.

The urgent care clinic has two GPs and a nurse. It provides concession card holders with the kind of assistance they need by simply bulkbilling them. Children under 16 and patients over 65 will also get access to bulkbilling. The clinic is open from 8 am to 6 pm Monday to Friday. The second stage will open in 2011 and will focus on diabetes, respiratory and mental health services, and paediatric and cardiovascular care. These are important issues in my region and the GP superclinics are absolutely vital.

Maintaining wonderful clinics like the Kambu Medical Centre in Ipswich is also important. I commend Ms Stella Taylor-Johnson, the CEO, who was recently elected as chair of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Community Health Service in Brisbane for the work that she has done. I have been to that centre on many occasions and I have also taken Minister Snowdon with me to that particular clinic. The funding for that comes from the budgetary provisions for health clinics across the country. Kambu is located in the Ipswich City Council area, which is home to 4,729 Indigenous people or 3.4 per cent of the area's population, according to the ABS census data collected in 2006. It receives considerable funding from the Department of Health and Ageing.

This is important for my local area because while this particular legislation is part of a national framework the people at the coalface—the doctors, nurses and allied health professionals—deal with patients everyday and there are capacity constraints that we see locally in the fast-growing region of the Ipswich and West Moreton area. The

provision of funding for 1,300 new subacute beds is also particularly important. We are more than doubling the funding for mental health services. We are investing \$1.6 billion for those new subacute beds, many of which will be able to be used by people suffering from mental disability. This is particularly important for my region because for a long time the Challinor Centre housed people with mental disability. Now many of these people are living in the community and looking after themselves with the support of wonderful local organisations like Focal Extended, ALARA, Blue Care and Lifeline.

While this is a bill that affects us nationally, I want to talk about how it affects my electorate in particular. I look forward to the Medicare Locals, with the emphasis on Ipswich being the hub and the spokes going out into the rural areas. The Ipswich General Hospital has received considerable assistance from us over the years. Since we have been elected, there has been additional assistance for elective surgery as well as for the infrastructure needed for those surgeries. This was to assist not just the waiting lists but also the hospital to become better able to cope with the growing areas of Springfield, the Ripley Valley and the areas west of Ipswich. I look forward to working with the local GPs in my area because I think they will make a big difference. Allied health and community health providers will also offer great assistance and I looking forward working with them to make sure that our region has the kind of health services that we need.

This legislation is important. As Tip O'Neill, the former Democrat House of Representatives spokesperson, said, 'All politics is local.' I wanted to talk tonight about how this national legislation and the establishment of this particular commission, as part of a whole framework, will affect my seat of Blair. I wanted to make sure that those of my constituents who listen to this speech and

follow what happens in the House of Representatives understood how important the National Health and Hospitals Network is not only for my electorate and the whole of the Ipswich and West Moreton region but also for the Lockyer Valley and the Scenic Rim.

Debate (on motion by **Ms Ley**) adjourned.

**SOCIAL SECURITY LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT (CONNECTING  
PEOPLE WITH JOBS) BILL 2010  
THERAPEUTIC GOODS AMENDMENT  
(2010 MEASURES No. 1) BILL 2010  
VETERANS' AFFAIRS LEGISLATION  
AMENDMENT (WEEKLY PAYMENTS)  
BILL 2010**

**Referred to Main Committee**

**Mr FITZGIBBON** (Hunter) (9.29 pm)—by leave—I move:

That the bills be referred to the Main Committee for further consideration.

Question agreed to.

**ADJOURNMENT**

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. BC Scott)**—Order! It being 9.30 pm, I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

**Mitchell Electorate: Road Funding**

**Mr HAWKE** (Mitchell) (9.30 pm)—I rise tonight to speak about Showground Road, a road of great importance to residents in my electorate. This week we were privileged to hear about the allocation by the New South Wales government of \$1 million towards the funding of Showground Road in Castle Hill. It might surprise the House to hear me praise the New South Wales government, Mr Deputy Speaker—and I can see you looking at me with shock—but it is a welcome development that \$1 million has been allocated to such an important arterial road in my electorate.

It is that case that my electorate has the highest rate of cars per household of any federal electorate in Australia. It is not something we are proud of. We also have the highest rate of couples with dependent children and we are one of the fastest growing regions in Australia, which mean that infrastructure, particularly transport infrastructure, is of vital importance. In noting this development this week, I want to congratulate in particular the member for Castle Hill, Mr Michael Richardson, who has made an enormous contribution over many years in highlighting the problems with Showground Road. Showground Road links the Castle Hill central business district and Windsor Road. Over 45,000 vehicles use this road every day. It is appalling to note that this vital road link in my electorate which is only 1.2 kilometres long has a single lane each way.

It is a great shame that in modern Australia we cannot build better infrastructure. In a major city like Sydney, infrastructure is well behind schedule and billion-dollar costs are associated with the fixing it. It is the case that when a federal government is proposing to spend infrastructure money and when we have a Minister for Infrastructure and Transport whose electorate is in New South Wales, we ought to have a better understanding and appreciation of how vital infrastructure is to a major city like Sydney. One of my great laments about this federal Labor government—the past one and this current one—is that the infrastructure minister has not allocated money to Sydney, the biggest city in Australia, for infrastructure spending. Infrastructure is such a problem in our state.

The New South Wales government has a roads budget of about \$4.7 billion that includes roads like the Pacific Highway and serious arterial and country roads all across the state. We are spending so much on a national broadband network, yet there are pro-

jects that affect the daily lives of my constituents, tens of thousands of them going begging, when really the money could be better spent on vitally needed transport infrastructure.

We have received this \$1 million for survey and design planning. It is a welcome development. I want to note the contribution of Michael Richardson. He has worked hard with all levels of government in my electorate—whether it be local government or state government, or indeed the Queensland Investment Corporation that is proposing a major redevelopment of the centre of Castle Hill—to have a rethink about how to fund infrastructure, how to ensure that everybody makes a contribution to upgrading the infrastructure at the time it is done.

One of the great things I like about suburbs in Perth is that they are rolling out infrastructure—train lines and roads—with the suburbs as they go. We all know that Sydney has not been planned in the way it ought to have been, and growth has been allowed. Special infrastructure levies have been charged on properties in my electorate for many years and infrastructure has not been returned to my electorate in kind for those extra charges. My electorate pay a high rates of tolls to and from the city on private motorways. We have no problem with private motorways as long as they work. When they do not work and tolls are so high, and you do not get value from them, infrastructure and Sydney planning have failed.

In an electorate with the highest rate of car dependency in Australia, in one of the fastest growing communities in Australia and with the highest rate of couples with dependent children, every adult and every family in Mitchell has a car. We do need money for infrastructure funding and I welcome the New South Wales government initiating this planning process. It is long overdue. How-

ever, they have missed this opportunity: just 1.2 kilometres of road, a small thing in the scheme of things that governments do—a thing that is done by other governments in places all around the world. It is time for reform of how we do infrastructure in New South Wales and Australia because we should be able to build 1.2 kilometres of road much cheaper than what they have planned and in a much shorter time frame.

**Holt Electorate: Eumemmerring and  
Chalcot Lodge Primary Schools  
RoboCup Junior Australia**

**Mr BYRNE** (Holt) (9.34 pm)—I rise tonight to recognise a group of outstanding young students from Eumemmerring Primary School and Chalcot Lodge Primary School, who by their efforts and endeavours have won a major national championship in a new and an increasingly important field at the frontier of scientific research. These young students through their hard work and effort won not only the state RoboCup championship but also the RoboCup junior national championship in Canberra last month. This outstanding achievement came after months of fundraising and hard work from the 17 strong team of grade 3 and 4 students from Eumemmerring and Chalcot Lodge primary schools.

The Australian National University hosted the day of competition on 18 September 2010 which saw the students competing against eight other state finalists from across the country. I think it is important to note that the sponsorship of this championship came from organisations like World Teaching Aids, University of New South Wales Computing and the internet giant, Google Australia.

RoboCup Junior Australia is a project oriented educational initiative that supports local, regional and international robotic events for young students. Teams work in a coop-

erative and supportive environment, developed by volunteer groups of teachers, past competitors and industry members. The focus of RoboCup Junior Australia is the development of teamwork skills as well as technical skills in an environment of participation, fun and excitement.

In 2000, the first international RoboCup junior competition was held in Melbourne. Since then schools throughout the world like the ones in my electorate have participated in this exciting robotics competition, which has led some people to classify it as the 'educational game of the new millennium'. What this means in reality is months of hard work assembling the robots, programming them and planning and choreographing the movements of the robots in a dance spectacular.

The winning performance by these two schools was called 'Monster Mash' and it was described in one of our great local newspapers as a 'spookily themed dance' that had robot zombies and skeletons, programmed and choreographed by students, dancing around gravestones and rising out of coffins. The enthusiasm and hard work of these students and of the teachers, Tamsin Bearsley and Melinda Browne, and the support of the parents and sponsors, culminated in this outstanding achievement. Tamsin said that it was done completely by the students. No teachers were allowed in the practice area. So students had to be completely organised and perform without any assistance from adults. Accordingly, Tamsin said, 'It blew the teachers away. The students did a very good job'. Keep in mind, these are students from grades 3 and 4.

Both school communities are extremely proud of each of the students in the team. In winning the national championships, the students demonstrated excellent ICT skills and teamwork, and also applied the qualities of persistence, resilience, cooperation and

drive—qualities that will stand them in good stead throughout their school and working lives.

The Principal of Chalcot Lodge Primary School, Kay Davies, and the Principal of Eumemmerring Primary School, Wayne MacDonald, are thrilled about their students' achievements at state and national levels. Everyone is extremely proud of them. Mrs Davies and Mr MacDonald believe that it is a great credit to these primary schools for providing opportunities for the students to achieve and to shine, and acknowledge the dedicated and talented staff and the never-failing support of the parents, which make Chalcot Lodge Primary and Eumemmerring Primary the wonderful and successful schools that they are.

A celebration event was held today at Chalcot Lodge Primary School to mark their national success. At the celebration, many of the students commented on their achievement. For example, one of the students said, 'It was exciting because we learnt how to make robots follow our commands.' Another said, 'It was great to work with friends and with robots. You get to try new things.' All of them, I am proud to report, enjoyed their trip to Canberra.

This achievement by grades 3 and 4 students is outstanding. It is a fantastic national competition. In the time remaining to me, I acknowledge Alia De Savery, Chelsey Stanciu, Rawan Al Musawi, Joseph Halliwell, Shane Bird, Chelsea Gao, Carissa Peart, Blake Eims, Shannyn Colgan, Rylee De Boucherville, Bella De Boucherville, Kyle Hilbrich, Nick Jovicic, Blake Rudling, Savannah Bradley, Jordyn Shanahan and Daniella Susak. All of these outstanding young students from grades 3 and 4, I point out, are studying and reaching out in an area which is groundbreaking.

I congratulate the organisers of the event for giving the students the opportunity to pursue their dreams, and in particular offer congratulations to everyone associated with Chalcot Lodge and Eumemmerring primary schools.

**Mr Carlo Salteri**

**Mr HOCKEY** (North Sydney) (9.39 pm)—Tonight I rise in the House of Representatives to pay tribute to one of our nation's most successful businessmen, Mr Carlo Salteri, who passed away earlier this month.

Since World War II Australia has greatly benefited from the hundreds of thousands of migrants who came from war torn lands to start a new life. Collectively they helped to build and shape modern Australia. Carlo Salteri was one of those people and must surely be regarded as one of Italy's greatest exports to our shores.

In 1951, at the age of 30, Carlo Salteri arrived in New South Wales as a mechanical engineer to work on a new transmission line from the Illawarra to Homebush. At Rome airport he met and became friends with another member of the project team, Franco Belgiorno-Nettis. At the conclusion of the project, both wisely decided to make Australia their home. Together they founded one of Australia's most significant construction and services enterprises, Transfield. During their 40-year partnership their company was to build some of Australia's most iconic infrastructure, such as the Sydney Harbour Tunnel and Brisbane's Gateway Bridge. In the late 1980s Transfield began to build its investment in defence industries. It won the tender to build the Anzac frigates and, in the process, re-established a naval shipbuilding capability in Australia.

In 1997 the Salteris and the Belgiorno-Nettises took separate paths as Transfield was de-merged. Carlo Salteri, at the tender

age of 76, together with his family, established Tenix, which quickly became the largest defence contractor in Australia.

Through his work at Transfield and Tenix, Carlo Salteri was rightly regarded as one of Australia's most significant businessmen. In 2002 he was formally recognised for his business leadership with a Companion of the Order of Australia.

Mr Salteri's commitment to our nation extended beyond his work in business. He had a strong desire to give back more broadly to the community. He established the Tenix Foundation, which provides assistance for education, research and underprivileged children. In addition, the Salteri family are very generous benefactors of many community organisations.

Carlo Salteri had strong values and strong faith. In his quiet and considered way, he was able to imbue in his extended family a set of values that most Australians would admire and respect. Tenix derives its name from the Latin word for tenacity. It was an appropriate choice for a man who achieved so much through daring and courage combined with an incredible work ethic that saw him remain on the board of Tenix until his death. He did, however, have a resolve tempered with compassion and thoughtfulness.

Throughout his life, Mr Salteri treasured a five-centime coin that his grandfather in Italy gave him before he moved to Australia. His grandfather told the teenage Salteri that 'to make a million, one has to start from a five-centime coin.' It was a message that he truly took to heart. He knew that success would only come through his own labours, hard work and initiative. It is this spirit of enterprise that is at the core of Australia's success as a nation and why we owe so much to people of Carlo Salteri's ilk.

When Tenix was founded, they located its head office in the North Sydney CBD, in my

electorate. I was honoured to spend time with Carlo Salteri over many relaxed lunches in his office. It was a particularly significant honour for me to be asked to open their new building, Innovation Place, a few years ago. It stands tall as one of North Sydney's most modern office buildings and is a testament to a man who, as his biographer, Peter Fitzsimons, wrote in the *Sydney Morning Herald* obituary, helped lay the foundations of modern Australia.

A person's legacy is not just measured by the bricks and mortar they leave behind. While such things may form permanent reminders, it is often the less tangible attributes by which we assess a person's achievements. In this regard, Carlo Salteri can be truly proud because he accomplished the most important task of all—to be a good husband, father, grandfather and great-grandfather who earned the love, respect and admiration of his family.

To all the Salteri family, on behalf of the Australian people, I send my most sincere condolences. Carlo will rest in peace knowing that his life was not only brimful with success but that his legacy will be honoured by a nation and its people for many generations to come.

#### Welfare Reforms

**Mr CHAMPION** (Wakefield) (9.44 pm)—I rise this evening to speak about the government's welfare reforms, in particular the trial of income management in both Perth and the Kimberly in Western Australia. Since November 2008 the federal government has been trialing compulsory income management in cases of child neglect in cooperation with the Western Australian government. Under this trial, the Department of Child Protection can refer people to Centrelink for income management to ensure that their children are being properly cared for. People living within the trial area can also volunteer

for income management to assist them in improving their budgeting and money management skills.

Recently there was an independent evaluation of the government's policy conducted by ORIMA Research which concluded that the trials are having a positive impact on the wellbeing of children and the families involved. The evaluation concluded that income management is helping to improve the lives of families involved in the trial by making sure that moneys that are provided by the government are spent on essential goods and items in the best interest of children and the families.

The evaluation found that 61 per cent of child protection income management participants and 67 per cent of voluntary income management participants surveyed thought that the income management process had improved their children's lives. Participants also reported spending more money on fresh food and clothing. They reported that income management helped them get their lives in order—71 per cent of participants on child protection income management and 80 per cent on voluntary income management reported they were able to regularly save money and were less likely to run out of money to pay rent and bills. After participating in income management, the percentage of people on child protection income management who were able to save money rose from 51 per cent to 70 per cent. Interestingly enough, two thirds of the people on the child protection income management stream said they had recommended or would recommend income management to others because of the positive impact that it had on their lives—82 per cent of those on voluntary income management said they would recommend it to others.

So we have here a very successful trial, one that has involved so far about 1,100 peo-

ple—328 under the child protection measure and 800 under the voluntary income management measure. That was from November 2008 to 2010. As of 2010 there are some 244 people participating in the child protection income management side of things and 457 people in voluntary income management.

We now have this program rolling out throughout the Northern Territory and we know that there have been significant child protection issues in that jurisdiction. We want to see that trial roll out. It is a very similar program to the trial being run in Western Australia. It is a non-discriminatory model of income management. It aims to provide financial stability to people who are vulnerable or who are at risk of harmful behaviour. This new model is targeted at all people who are likely to benefit from income management and there are exemptions available for full-time students, and people who have a sustained history of workplace participation or who can adequately demonstrate their proper care and education of their children.

This is a very valuable trial. It is a very valuable program. I think the government should be commended for introducing it. My only hope is that we can roll it out to more areas across Australia and, in particular, I would hope that we could roll it out in parts of my electorate as well. I think linking Centrelink with the child protection system is a very, very important policy lever to prevent neglect and to help put families back on the right path to help them look after their children. I commend it to the House.

#### **Wright Electorate: Coal Seam Gas**

**Mr BUCHHOLZ** (Wright) (9.50 pm)—I rise in the House to draw the attention of my colleagues to some matters which affect my electorate. I note that I have received advice from the Queensland Farmers' Federation and wish to acknowledge their contribution

in this speech. The minister has recently announced approvals for liquefied natural gas facilities at Gladstone. This is the downstream outlet for the coal seam gas which will be extracted from my electorate of Wright and other electorates in regional Queensland. This decision will likely trigger other coal seam gas projects throughout the Surat Basin. The rapid expansion of the industry is outpacing science and frightening landowners on whom the properties and the well heads are being constructed. While the agricultural industry does not wish to stand against developments that support a diverse economy, concerns remain about the slow planning process surrounding coal seam gas, particularly in light of the myriad scientific details that remain still under debate.

Just last week, AgForce and other groups called for a moratorium on coal seam gas. The Queensland Farmers' Federation raised the prospect of a moratorium six months ago, indicating there was a strong argument for government to adopt precautionary principles with coal seam gas development, given the government has been willing to quickly do this for other areas of state planning. The farming and rural interests want a fair policy for strategic cropping land in Queensland. Without appropriate safeguards there is potential for damage to farmland, underground water, and the environment. The risk is now heightened following the approvals for the liquid gas facility at Gladstone.

These concerns were exacerbated early last week with reports that testing in eight exploratory wells near Miles had revealed traces of BTEX chemicals—that is, benzene, toluene, ethylene and xylene. While these traces were small, it demonstrates the importance of protecting agricultural land and rural residents who rely on underground water for stock and domestic consumption. Re-pressurisation and connectivity of underground

reserves cannot be guaranteed but need to be taken seriously.

We do not want to see a repeat of the proposed Murray-Darling Basin plan. The water minister has indicated in this place that he has ordered a review of the Water Act legislation in relation to the Murray-Darling overview and I would urge him to widen that review to include the impact of coal seam gas on regional Queensland's underground water resources. We need to know whether the Water Act can actually deliver on the triple bottom line aspirations that good policy would require.

It seems curious that at the very time the minister has approved the coal seam gas projects we have also seen the launch of the Queensland Alliance for Agriculture and Food Innovation, which I will refer to as the alliance. As I said in my maiden speech, my electorate contains some of the most productive agricultural land in Australia—the Lockyer Valley and Scenic Rim districts. Given its close proximity to major markets, this farmland represents a strategic resource which goes to the heart of our food security.

The alliance has been launched with a view to cementing Queensland's position as an international leader in tropical and subtropical agriculture and food research. The alliance is a new institute of the University of Queensland, which runs its Gatton campus in my electorate. We need to know whether the minister's approval for coal seam gas projects has taken this initiative into account. Under the alliance, plant, animal and food scientists will work together to develop new technologies and practices to benefit these important industries.

It is hoped that the alliance will strengthen Queensland's collective capacity to deliver high-impact research and development outcomes in areas that will not only benefit Queensland industries, but will also put

Queensland on the map as a world leader in tropical and subtropical agriculture and food research. The range of research to be undertaken at the alliance is extensive and highly industry focused. The outcomes are expected to return millions of dollars to Queensland agriculture and food industries in the future. Therefore, I urge the minister to take these matters seriously and provide some assurance to my electors that their interests are being considered. In summary, I would urge the minister to widen the review of the Water Act legislation in relation to the Murray-Darling overview to include the impact of coal seam gas on regional Queensland's underground water resources.

#### **Cunningham Electorate: Broadband**

**Ms BIRD** (Cunningham) (9.54 pm)—I want to take the opportunity in the adjournment debate tonight to update the House on the issue of the National Broadband Network in my region. As I have spoken previously about it, I wanted to give an update to the House and also acknowledge that my colleague the member for Throsby has also contributed to this debate in the House this week, something that has taken up a fair amount of the attention of the House. In the debate today the member for Wentworth raised the question of what exactly the problem was. I draw his attention to a two-page special in the *Illawarra Mercury* on Saturday that talked about the National Broadband Network and in particular highlighted how there is a significant problem for suburbs across our region where the existing infrastructure is failing to provide the sort of broadband that a modern economy in a region like ours needs.

The former member for Throsby and I asked the Illawarra branch of Regional Development Australia to undertake a strategic positioning paper for our RDA area on the potential of the National Broadband Network

to facilitate economic growth and development. They did that through a subcommittee of RDA headed up by Mr Geoff McQueen, who is a prominent and very successful internet entrepreneur in the Illawarra region. They identified that there are significant suburbs—for example, around the area of Figtree—where the old copper network is incapable, without significant upgrading, of providing ADSL broadband services. For a significant number of years now I have been dealing with constituents ringing me expressing frustration with that.

It is also important to acknowledge that, although many of the northern suburbs in our region that cling to the escarpment overlooking the sea are beautiful places to live, they are not in particularly friendly topography if your only option is wireless broadband. So we have many people in those suburbs who cannot get ADSL because of the failure to upgrade the connections and cannot get wireless either, or if they do get wireless it is particularly unreliable. During this debate about the National Broadband Network, it is certainly something that has been raised with me regularly and people are actually particularly supportive of the rollout of fibre to the home.

The *Illawarra Mercury* article, written by local journalist Matthew Jones, also highlighted a case that had come to my attention. I will just read Matthew's report:

It's 9am, and Coalcliff's Ben Rennie is waiting to hook up to a video conference call with a business client in New York.

Along with partners in Melbourne, Perth and Bondi, Mr Rennie connects, but soon there is a hitch—a one-gigabyte digital presentation hasn't arrived in the client's inbox, and the whole call is relying on it.

Half an hour of wasted time later, the presentation has arrived, but Mr Rennie has disappeared from the call as his internet connection has dropped out. What should have been a productive

business meeting quickly became an exercise in frustration.

The culprit? Slow and unreliable broadband.

Mr Rennie is a director and co-founder of strategic consultancy firm 6.2 and believes he's a perfect example of how the high-speed National Broadband Network could change the way our region does business.

Made up of 12 consultants, 6.2 is one of a new breed of businesses that live "in the cloud", with much of their important data stored offsite and only accessible via the web.

That means the internet is more than just a useful tool, Mr Rennie says. "It means if I've got downtime, or the connection's slow, it just makes us inefficient. When you're living on the cloud, so to speak, you can't just pop your head around the corner and say, 'hey, are you there, bro?' and have a quick chat," he said.

The Federal Government is hoping the NBN will be the cure for such cyberspace ills.

This exactly highlights the potential of a fibre-to-the-home broadband network to revolutionise the way that people work. Here is a gentleman running an international business from home. I am particularly keen to see the opportunities, as the RDA is, for teleworking for the many commuters who could actually work more effectively from home in a new world where fibre is provided and, importantly for these businesses and home based work, not only download but also upload speeds are significantly improved. I think it is time the debate moved on on the issue. *(Time expired)*

#### **Murray-Darling Basin**

**Mr McCORMACK** (Riverina) (9.59 pm)—A report in the *Daily Telegraph* yesterday, headed 'Fear for ghost towns' included the Riverina's Hillston and Leeton as centres at greatest risk if water cuts proposed by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority proceeded. Members on this side of the House have been aware for a long time just how hard the cuts would hit regional Australia

whilst for whatever reason, convenient or otherwise, it has only just dawned upon those opposite. Those opposite have not had to worry. There aren't any Labor electorates in the Murray-Darling Basin. But, you know, Labor members do like to eat and drink and when country communities—the farmers who produce the food to feed the nation—protest in their thousands then the government has to take action.

This is why the government set up on 14 October—less than two weeks ago and on the very same day that 7,000 men, women and children rallied at Griffith—a parliamentary inquiry to ensure the socioeconomic impacts of the Basin Plan were taken into consideration. This is why the Minister for Sustainability, Environment, Water, Population and Communities, Tony Burke, told parliament last Thursday that he had called for legal advice from the Australian Government Solicitor about the Water Act. This is why the water minister visited Griffith on Friday to meet civic leaders, family farmers and business people to listen to what they had to say.

The inquiry, the legal advice and the minister's visit are all welcome—overdue, but very welcome. But this government took six months to get to a water policy, 18 months to establish the Murray-Darling Basin Authority and 36 months to form the view, which was bleeding obvious to everyone else, that there needs to be a proper analysis of the social and economic impact—the human cost. Speaking of bleeding, that is precisely what communities in the Murrumbidgee Irrigation Area, which is in my Riverina electorate, are doing and will continue to do until the wrongs of this 'guide to a draft to a plan' are made right. That is what will happen whilst the uncertainty of proposed water cut-backs—sustainable diversion limits—hangs unfairly like a guillotine blade over the heads

of all those in the MIA and other basin communities.

How did Labor get this so wrong? Why did Labor move forward under a process by former water minister Penny Wong which clearly did not get the legal advice in order to correctly follow the act? The current water minister admitted yesterday that the comments made publicly by the Murray-Darling Basin Authority, that the Water Act did not allow it to fully take account of socioeconomic issues, were not supported by his legal advice. Not supported by his legal advice! Now we all know and it is what many in irrigation communities have been arguing all along: that the authority can and should and must adopt a triple bottom line approach and that the act is not just environment, environment, environment.

The water minister virtually rebuked the MDBA and warned it cannot hide behind the falsehood that the Water Act forces it to put the environment over communities. The MDBA's guide suggested only 800 jobs would be lost if water cuts up to 45 per cent occurred. What a joke. What an insult to hardworking family farmers and regional communities. It will be more in the order of 8,000.

I am worried that this Labor-Greens alliance wants to turn the country back to nature, a move which will drive farmers off the land, send regional communities to the wall, ruin our balance of payments, jeopardise food security and significantly increase food prices. Environmentalism gone mad!

The water minister faced some of the key stakeholders of the MIA at Griffith and I am appreciative that he took me with him. He penned a lot of notes and listened intently to what the people of Coleambally, Griffith and Leeton had to say. I am sure he came away far better informed, but whether those new insights materialise into something positive

for Australia's greatest food bowl remains to be seen. As the Griffith Mayor, Councillor Mike Neville, said, this whole water debate has been 'misinformed and misled from the start' and what is now needed is certainty and clarity, not just in the MIA's best interests but in the national interest.

Perhaps the most telling remarks made to the minister at Griffith concerned the state of mental health of some of the people whose futures and livelihoods depend on the availability of water for important productive use. As the water minister left on Friday, one of the locals said to me he hoped the government was not merely paying lip service or buying time. I hold the same hope.

#### **Kingston Electorate: Roads**

**Ms RISHWORTH** (Kingston) (10.04 pm)—I rise today to raise the issue of the condition of roads in my electorate of Kingston. This is an issue that is regularly raised with me and I would like to work with the local community and all levels of government to ensure that we get action on the condition of our roads. The 30-year Plan for Greater Adelaide projects significant population growth in the southern suburbs of Adelaide and the Fleurieu Peninsula. We are already seeing this in places such as Seaford and Aldinga. In response there is now a strong vision that the Noarlunga area will become a transport orientated development. With this growth there needs to be transport infrastructure that keeps up with it to ensure that there is not urban congestion and that residents are able to easily get around.

There has been significant funding for the Noarlunga to Seaford rail extension, which will have a significant impact on urban congestion in our local area. Also, the state government has committed at the last election to duplicate the Southern Expressway. This has been widely welcomed by local residents because in our electorate of Kingston some

years ago there was an expressway that was built as only one way, a great frustration to local residents. So I very much welcome the state government's commitment to make sure that this transport infrastructure is put in to help with the movement of cars.

But there have been some concerns about specific roads and I would like to raise a number of these here tonight. For many residents in the local community of Noarlunga and Morphett Vale, there has been concern about the condition of Beach Road. It concerns a particular stretch between Main South Road and the roundabout to the Southern Expressway. Many local residents have expressed concern that it is very dangerous and other residents have said that it has taken up to 20 minutes for them to get from a side street on to this road. Over 200 people have responded to my survey expressing frustration with Beach Road. It is really important that we work to make sure that this road is improved so that local residents are not having this frustration, certainly considering that the Noarlunga area will become a transport orientated development.

In addition to the concerns with Beach Road, I have also had many people raise concerns about the stretch of Main South Road between Seaford and Sellicks Beach. Local residents have expressed a number of safety concerns which include regular speed limit variations as well as a single-lane road. They are also concerned with the twists and turns that can be very difficult to negotiate, and with the undulation of the road. Given the fact that this road is becoming a major thoroughfare for growing communities such as Seaford, Aldinga and Sellicks, residents have called for general improvements to its quality. Many have expressed the view that there should be a second lane heading in each direction. These are important road infrastructure issues that I will continue to lobby on. In addition to this stretch of road

other residents have raised the state of Old Coach Road which connects the Seaford area to Aldinga. This has been of concern to a number of residents and, as with the other roads, I will continue to lobby on their behalf.

Ensuring that the south has adequate transport infrastructure is incredibly important. For too long under the previous federal government the transport infrastructure was ignored. I am pleased that we are making progress in the area of rail infrastructure through the investment of the state government in the Southern Expressway. We need to make sure that our roads, especially our secondary roads and back streets, are maintained and we need to make sure that they are safe for the commuters that use them.

In addition to safety we need to consider the urban congestion in the area, especially as growth increases. We need to make sure that residents are not frustrated or put in danger, and that the roads are adequate to take growth. I will continue to work with the state government, the local council and the federal government to ensure that we continue to put better transport infrastructure into the southern suburbs of Adelaide.

#### **Brisbane Electorate: Achievement Awards**

**Ms GAMBARO** (Brisbane) (10.09 pm)—On 22 October at the Queensland Academy for Creative Industries theatre in Kelvin Grove I had the pleasure to attend the presentation of the achievement awards for excellence in creativity, innovation, design and achievement—all presented by the Queensland Academy for Creative Industries at their excellent awards evening. I was genuinely impressed with the very talented individuals recognised on the evening and I experienced some truly amazing performances. In particular, the performance of *Madame Butterfly* by Adeline Williams and *The Carl*

*Vine Sonata* by Faron Swingler were genuinely inspiring.

I was most impressed by the motivation and the interest in new ideas that many participants and performers portrayed on the night. It was great to see the recognition of some original creations and achievements. I wish to commend the Principal, Mr John Rose, who highlighted the achievements of many hard-working and brilliant individuals, whose academic accomplishments are second to none across Australia and internationally. I am particularly determined to support all educational institutions in the electorate of Brisbane, and I commend QACI and their students for their truly wonderful achievements and a fantastic night of entertainment.

Another tremendous community event in my electorate that I recently attended—which is probably as far away from the arts as you can get—was the Fortitude Valley Juniors Rugby League presentations and awards day on 9 October. Valley Juniors, or the Diehards, is a club of tremendous spirit. It is an organisation that provides juniors with all the necessary facilities and volunteers to ensure that the young ones involve themselves in a great sporting competition. The organisation is well organised and supported by a great number of the parents. There were almost 150 people at the presentation.

I witnessed the result of a season's worth of team work, skill development and reward for participation for the junior club. It was a fantastic day and everyone got involved. I congratulate the committee and all the parents, volunteers and players for their terrific club spirit. It struck me on the day that Valley Juniors is very much a family club and does a great job in welcoming people from very diverse cultures and backgrounds. They also welcome people from the local and wider community.

Whilst rugby league is predominantly played by boys, Valley Juniors encourages and promotes the participation of girls as well, which I find tremendous. It is also notable that on the day Councillor Fiona King from the Marchant ward was in attendance, and she is a very great supporter of this club. I commend her on the work that she is doing, particularly with the improvement of playing fields. I also commend Valley Juniors on a wonderful award day for all.

Another recent and enjoyable event that I attended was held last week and was the CEO Challenge—Art From Your Heart Auction. Australian celebrities and business leaders picked up their paint brushes, painted the town red and raised \$30,000 at this fabulous event. The attendees mingled with the artists, their families and supporters, and bidded—sometimes quite furiously—on the art pieces to help raise vital funds for organisations that crusade against domestic violence. It must be mentioned that the event was sponsored and supported greatly by Grant Thornton Australia, and the event was opened by Her Excellency the Governor-General, Quentin Bryce.

The artists, which included me and my own very modest artwork of my beautiful daughter Rachele and her dog Bilosky, captured the essence of their family on the canvas. Each artist expressed how much they valued and how much they appreciated the loved ones in their lives. I was very surprised to see a reserve price of \$500 placed on my artwork. These unique pieces were donated for a very special fundraiser. All in attendance truly had a great sense of enjoyment and appreciated all the contributions. My personal favourites were those of Sally-Anne Atkinson as well as the former Governor of Queensland, Leneene Forde, and Chris Moody, a local businesswoman.

I believe that each contributor would also have thought seriously about our ability to conjure happy and safe memories for this project while at the same time recognising that such happiness and safety is not necessarily experienced by all in our community. Domestic violence is a serious problem. The figures are disturbing, and I was pleased and grateful to support this very original and thoughtful initiative. I commend all involved in the project, and I was very thankful that I was able to contribute to this very worthy cause.

#### **Robertson Electorate: Arts Community**

**Ms O'NEILL** (Robertson) (10.14 pm)—We are all blessed to work in a dynamic workplace that is full of drama. That is probably a good thing at 10.15 at night. Most of us in this place thrive on it. I would like to pay tribute tonight to those people on the Central Coast who put drama into our lives and who would like to put in a bit more. Drama in its many forms enhances our understandings of life.

On Saturday week the Friends of the Performing Arts Precinct will hold their annual general meeting at the Central Coast Leagues Club in Gosford. The Friends were very active during the recent federal election campaign, and they are enthusiastically backing, as I do, the development of a regional performing arts centre in Gosford. The Friends have a grand vision that encompasses an acoustic concert hall, a new conservatorium and a regional auditorium, and those familiar with the Gosford waterfront would realise that the Central Coast Leagues Club is in fact well situated to provide an iconic location for such a centre in the future. Gosford City Council has given the project in principle support and is working to finalise the design and costings. I will be watching this performance closely.

The vibrant performing arts community on the Central Coast deserves a boost. In the seat of Robertson we have a wonderful musical society, the Gosford Music Society, as well as the Laycock Street Theatre, the Woy Woy Little Theatre and the Mad Cow Theatre Company. We also have NAISDA, the National Aboriginal and Islander Skills Development Association, Australia's national tertiary Indigenous dance training organisation.

These community theatre and dance groups are core parts of our community. They tell our stories, they tell others' stories and they help us to relax, think and imagine. These are some of the gifts that the arts bring to our lives. I hope during my time as the member for Robertson I can go some way to advancing the cause of the performing arts on the Central Coast and give its friends the kind of boost they are yearning for.

Tonight I would also like to pay tribute—to shine an usher's torchlight, as it were—on another Central Coast icon in our arts community, the Avoca Beach picture theatre. Nearly every local person and many of our tourist visitors from Sydney and beyond will have experienced watching a film there at some time in the last 50 years or so. Just a stone's throw from the beautiful and famous Avoca Beach, the theatre has been in operation since 1951, when it was built by the Hunter family. Currently it is owned and operated by Beth and Norman Hunter, who have reinvigorated it. They provide wonderful access to a wide range of film art and other forms of dramatic art. If you took a trip to Avoca Beach picture theatre, Mr Speaker, you could find yourself stepping back in time to a bygone era, transported by the luxury of rich red velvet and dimming wall lights as the screen curtains draw and we move into a place where we suspend disbelief and invest in the stories that flicker across the screen in front of us.

I have to say that the challenge to see past the limitations of the building in the 1980s, when my husband and I first moved up to the Central Coast, was a much more challenging task before the refurbishments of the 1990s, when the theatre was refitted. I am envious of the mums and bubs sessions, which were not available when I was raising my kids. Sharing a film with other mums and connecting with them before and after is a very appealing idea and a great way to build social capital. In recent years the range of options about what can be seen, experienced, and learned at the Avoca Beach picture theatre has been impressive indeed.

The theatre not only has major releases; it screens foreign films, independent releases and even films of opera productions from the Metropolitan Opera in New York. Most recently Beth and Norman offered up film of the UK's National Theatre Live, including works by Shakespeare. To this range of options the Avoca Beach theatre also offers patrons the chance to see live drama and live music and to hire a venue. You can even hold your wedding at the cinema, as one of my former students did.

On the first Tuesday in November, Melbourne Cup Day revellers will be enjoying a screening of the Marx Brothers' *A Day at the Races*—of course. The theatre also provides a venue for budding local filmmakers. The Coasties short film festival offers a chance for young and old to record our own time and tell our own stories about our lives and our region. There is also an annual Indigenous film festival and of course the obligatory surf film festival.

In addition to what one can see and experience when the lights go down in our Central Coast town, there is the Avoca Film Group. I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate Elaine Odgers Norling, who has been the facilitator of the Avoca Film

Group for over five years. Elaine is a great community activist. She understands the capacity of film and the arts to lift and enable us to envision new ways of living, being and thinking.

I began my speech speaking of the drama of this place as the source of my selection of this element of life. I look forward to attending many more wonderful movies at the Avoca Beach picture theatre and I honour the work of Beth and Norman Hunter.

### Franchise Sector

**Mrs GASH** (Gilmore) (10.19 pm)—The South Australian government's announcement that it intends to appoint a small business commissioner to oversight the franchise industry in that state is something that the federal government should certainly take on board. It is a step in the right direction and a precursor to further legislation being introduced later this year. It brings into stark contrast the differences in approach between two levels of government, albeit from the same political fold. It also begs the question as to why the South Australian government is prepared to act and why the federal government has resisted every attempt to introduce similar reforms.

I note the sentiment expressed by the new Minister for Small Business, who has assumed responsibility for this matter, that he does not intend to change the status quo. This is very disappointing because it signals the fact that this government is not prepared to address the blight of churning within the franchise industry, despite the wealth of evidence against the practice. But it also raises the question as to why the federal government has chosen to follow this direction despite having been handed a report on the industry in December 2008. The former minister's announcement earlier this year of some changes was dismissed by an industry expert, who described the provisions as window-

dressing. What the South Australian government has done is highlight the failure of the federal government to act decisively and sympathetically in response to a well-established case for the need to do so. Western Australia will follow suit, and in Queensland similar calls are being made.

There is absolutely no doubt in my mind of the need to codify the regulation of the franchise industry. At the present time the rules are heavily weighted in favour of the franchisor, relying very much on their goodwill. This is hardly a satisfactory formula for commercial success, and the inquiry handed to the government in December 2008 reflects that.

In an article in *The Punch* entitled 'So who really is the new Labor competition minister?' Professor Frank Zumbo questions why the competition portfolio is absent from the ministerial line-up. I note that Frank Zumbo is in the gallery tonight and I applaud him for his passion on the subject. Given the previous minister's inaction—in spite of all the adverse commentary—the hundreds of cases of failed franchises, evidence of the practice of churning and the heartbreak and the despair of victims, it is not hard to suspect that this is a strategy on the part of the government to quell debate.

Yet another worrying development has since emerged. Potential franchisees are now being asked by the franchisor to first sign a deed of surrender and release. This instrument prevents the franchisee from suing the franchisor for damages or commenting in any way on any aspect of the contract. This constitutes an effective gag on the franchisee, adding to the suite of factors that work against the franchisee. As far as I can understand, the deed does not preclude the franchisor from engaging in predatory behaviour or from exploiting their position. I suspect that having such an instrument in place de-

livers the franchisor even more protection from legal remedy. It makes the case for reform even more compelling rather than less.

The minister would be well aware of this recent development, so his statements to the Franchise Council of Australia national convention protecting the status quo are even more remarkable. The government's only response has been to state that the franchisors must provide to the franchisees more upfront disclosure so as to alert franchisees to the types of information which must remain confidential, including settlements, mediation outcomes, intellectual property, trade secrets and aspects of individual agreements. Now, hang on—if the franchisee signed a deed of silence, how could they report any failure on the part of the franchisor to be upfront, let alone seek a remedy for damages? What is not addressed is how some franchisors use these agreements to further screw their franchisees by refusing to pay any money owed to the franchisee until they sign these agreements. If that is not a standover tactic, what is?

I am concerned at the inaction of this government towards the franchise industry on the face of the evidence that has been made available to it—or, should I say, towards franchisees, because everything the government has done or failed to do so far has favoured franchisors over the franchisees. The franchisor hides behind these agreements, and the ACCC refuses to look beyond them. Is there anyone on the government benches with the courage to argue that these new deeds of silence are not unconscionable or are not harsh and oppressive? I find it remarkable that a government so driven by protecting employees from unfair dismissal patently rejects a similar philosophy for the self-employed worker. It begs the question as to whether there is another agenda playing in the background and who the primary beneficiaries could be. The practice of churning is

simply corruption, through and through, and it is not being discouraged by this government.

I also thank the member for Hughes for being present. I know his passion for small business and for franchisees goes without question.

#### **McEwen Electorate: Lancefield**

**Mr MITCHELL** (McEwen) (10.24 pm)—I take the opportunity tonight to rise to congratulate the town of Lancefield on its celebration of its 150 official years of establishment and its recent 25th agricultural show, which I had the pleasure of opening, along with my state colleague Joanne Duncan, the very hardworking member for Macedon.

Lancefield, like many areas in the electorate of McEwen, is a community orientated town which truly epitomises the essence of the word 'community'. This is in part due to the town's very strong volunteering attributes. I have always believed that volunteers are the backbone of our community, donating their time for the causes they so strongly believe in and, in turn, enriching the lives of and benefiting so many others around them.

I believe that volunteering is vital in building strong communities, and Lancefield is proof of that, with many volunteer organisations such as the CFA, Lancefield Neighbourhood House, the park management committee, the historical society, our schools, the Lions clubs and the Lancefield Agricultural Society. You know that it is an active, energetic and caring place. These local volunteers commit and dedicate themselves to the betterment of our society. Together with the great work of many in the community, we are now celebrating, as I said, the town's 150th official anniversary. Local volunteering groups are also great for the volunteers themselves, as they provide them with opportunities to meet new people

and develop new skills and friendships, and in turn that builds a stronger community.

Lancefield is also a town rich in history and rich in culture. It is home to the very popular Lancefield and District Farmers Market, which is held every fourth Saturday of the month and attracts people from the region and across Victoria alike. You will find local produce, from local spuds and veggies to livestock, organic meat, fresh honey, olives and much, much more. The town's history is encapsulated in its art galleries, like the Mad Gallery and the Bankart Gallery, and buildings like the old National Bank and, in particular, the iconic Macedonia Hotel. The Indigenous history of the area is another highlight of the region, with a very significant greenstone flint quarry at Mount William, which is just outside the township.

As I said, the town held its 25th Lancefield Agricultural Show, and I believe its success is a tribute to the volunteers like those of the Lancefield Agriculture Society, who since 1984 have contributed so much to local agriculture and the community. The society works all year to put on this show, which entails all the fun and excitement of a true country show. There are cattle competitions, horse events, art and craft competitions and dog events, and you get chooks, goats, alpacas and sheep events, motorcycle-riding competitions, Rural Ambassador Awards, Junior Ambassador Awards, carnival rides and various stalls from local businesses. These agricultural shows are a vital part of keeping communities connected with each other.

I would like to thank the members of the Lancefield Agricultural Society for their ongoing work, particularly the president, John Sheehan, who has been with the society since its inception in 1984. John was very welcoming to me at the show and even gave

me some great tips on learning how to judge cattle and sheep. I thank Ken Notman too, who has also put in many, many years as the president, and Bev Harris, who is a founding member and after so many years still continues to assist the cattle section.

Of course, the show would not go on without people like Kate Coulter, the secretary of the agricultural society. I know that Kate worked extremely hard in organising this show. Sadly, Greg Parks, one of the instigators of the stud breeders association, had recently passed away and was not able to enjoy the benefits of his hard work on this show. These people are only a few of the many who have served the society and the community in their capacity as local volunteers.

I am honoured to join the community of Lancefield in the town's celebrations this year and I congratulate all involved in achieving these two milestones, the 150 years of the town's continuous existence and the 25th anniversary of the show. I am proud to represent such a fantastic community and I invite all members of this place to come and enjoy the unique experience of Lancefield, from its vibrant arts scene to its gifts and antiques shopping, the great food, particularly the award-winning wineries, and, importantly, the great community spirit.

Question agreed to.

**House adjourned at 10.29 pm**

#### **NOTICES**

The following notices were given:

**Mr Swan** to present a bill for an act to amend the Federal Financial Relations Act 2009, and for other purposes.

**Mr McClelland** to present a bill for an act to criminalise some acts involving certain munitions, and for related purposes.

**Ms Roxon** to move:

That, in accordance with section 10B of the *Health Insurance Act 1973*, the House approves the Health Insurance (Extended Medicare Safety Net—Midwives) Amendment Determination 2010 made on 13 October 2010 and presented to the House on 25 October 2010.

**Ms Roxon** to move:

That, in accordance with section 10B of the *Health Insurance Act 1973*, the House approves the Health Insurance (Extended Medicare Safety Net) Amendment Determination 2010 (No. 2) made on 12 October 2010 and presented to the House on 25 October 2010.

**Mr Georganas** to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
  - (a) 14 November 2010 is United Nations World Diabetes Day, with this year's theme being diabetes education and prevention;
  - (b) the symbol for World Diabetes Day is a blue ring which symbolises:
    - (i) life;
    - (ii) health;
    - (iii) the sky that connects all nations; and
    - (iv) the unity of the global diabetes community in response to the diabetes pandemic; and
  - (c) diabetes is Australia's fastest growing chronic disease with up to 3.3 million people estimated to have diabetes or pre-diabetes, and one person in Australia diagnosed every seven minutes;
- (2) recognises that:
  - (a) diabetes is a complex and chronic disease which affects the entire body and often lasts a lifetime;
  - (b) Type 2 Diabetes is the most common form of diabetes accounting for 85-90 per cent of all cases and costs the economy up to \$3 billion dollars every year;
  - (c) a person with Type 2 Diabetes and no complications costs the community

\$9625 a year and a person with Type 2 Diabetes who has complications costs the community \$15 850 per year; and

- (d) there is currently no cure for diabetes, but up to 60 per cent of cases of Type 2 Diabetes are preventable; and
- (3) supports:
    - (a) diabetes awareness and education campaigns;
    - (b) healthy lifestyles and other preventative measures; and
    - (c) research for a cure.

**Mr Georganas** to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
  - (a) 25 November is designated by the United Nations as International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, and that the white ribbon is the symbol for this day;
  - (b) on 25 November around Australia, thousands of men and women will be wearing a white ribbon to show their support for this cause and taking an oath to never to commit, excuse or remain silent about violence against women; and
  - (c) White Ribbon Day aims to build cultural change around the issue of violence against women through education and by promoting a culture of non-violence and respect, particularly among men and boys;
- (2) recognises that:
  - (a) violence against women remains the most widespread human rights abuse in the world—one in three Australian women has experienced violence, and one in five Australian women will experience sexual assault;
  - (b) violence against women occurs in many forms including domestic violence; general assault; homicide; femicide; rape and sexual assault; homophobic violence; genital mutilation; enforced prostitution, motherhood and abortion; and elder abuse; and

- (c) violence against women and their children was estimated to cost the Australian economy around \$13.6 billion in 2008-09 and, without a reduction in current rates, will cost the economy an estimated \$15.6 billion by 2021-22; and
- (3) commits itself to:
  - (a) supporting the White Ribbon Day campaign;
  - (b) the elimination of violence against women; and
  - (c) a zero tolerance approach to all violence in our communities.

**Mr Baldwin** to move:

That this House:

- (1) condemns the Rudd-Gillard Government for:
  - (a) reducing funding for Tourism Australia at a time when the high Australian dollar is putting pressure on local tourism operators; and
  - (b) increasing business costs for local tourism operators through:
    - (i) higher tourism taxes;
    - (ii) the bungled award modernisation; and
    - (iii) additional superannuation guarantee payments which will be entirely funded by employers; and
- (2) calls on the Rudd-Gillard Government to match the Coalition's commitment to increase tourism funding by \$100 million to:
  - (a) focus on high-yielding business events tourists;
  - (b) build stronger research foundations;
  - (c) encourage tourism infrastructure and product development; and
  - (d) boost domestic tourism marketing.

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*Tuesday, 26 October 2010*

The **DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)** took the chair at 4 pm.

### **CONSTITUENCY STATEMENTS**

#### **Brisbane Electorate: Home Insulation Program**

**Ms GAMBARO** (Brisbane) (4.00 pm)—I rise today to raise the ongoing concerns of Brisbane residents about the home insulation scheme debacle. One universally recognised form of injustice and cruelty is leaving people in an ongoing state of stressful limbo, unsure of the outcome in their personal situation. The latest phase of the horrendous home insulation debacle is the government's utter failure to accept or respond to legitimate complaints about its ceiling insulation scheme. No decent response has emanated from the government. They are far from timely and in many cases there is no response at all. The government's attempt at an answer was to establish an 1800 hotline but, as recent examples highlighted to the House have shown, concerns communicated to this number have been ignored or those with concerns have been told to try the Ombudsman.

Affected residents in my own electorate of Brisbane are aware and genuinely concerned about the ongoing government inaction. They know of the link to house fires, they know of the high estimations of roofs being live with electricity and they have general fear with over 200,000 dodgy and dangerous roofs still remaining unchecked.

My electorate office in Brisbane has received several recent reports from very concerned constituents. The complaints range from the basic to the bizarre. There have been cases highlighting the rip-offs such as where pink batts were installed in a Brisbane residence, were ripped out and moved to a coastal holiday home, allowing for a second round of batts to be installed in the original home at taxpayers' expense. This scheme initiated pure economic vandalism.

Mr Leeson from Newmarket in Brisbane would not mind a decent night's sleep. He cannot sleep at night because of the noise from some pesky possums keeping him and his household awake at night. He cannot do anything about it because Peter the possum man will not attend due to the genuine fear that the roof is dangerous and that the foil insulation urgently needs to be inspected. Mr Leeson's issue is now moving into its 12th month. He contacted the previous member for Brisbane 12 months ago. No inspection has yet occurred. The government's inaction is not a laughing matter. How would government members feel if they had not had a decent night's sleep for a year?

Other residents who have witnessed this scheme at its worst have sighted rental vans loaded with pink batts driving up and down streets cold calling residents ready for a series of rushed installation jobs. Now there is a state of confusion. Affected residents are anxious for their homes to be cleared of danger. One Brisbane resident had someone attend his home for an inspection and suddenly the foil disappeared without him being asked for his permission for it to be removed. So he has no insulation at all. He is one of the lucky ones. What a disgrace. (*Time expired*)

**Fraser Electorate: West Belconnen Health Cooperative**

**Dr LEIGH** (Fraser) (4.03 pm)—I rise today to inform the House about some terrific progress being made by the West Belconnen Health Cooperative in Charnwood. Earlier this year the local community owned and professionally managed health co-op opened. I had the pleasure of recently visiting the health co-op and I was shown around by Michael Pilbrow, the current Chair of the West Belconnen Health Cooperative. The co-op began providing a bulk-billing GP medical service from a centre in Charnwood which served one of the more disadvantaged populations in my electorate. It is funded by small annual fees which are charged to co-op members. The centre currently has over 5,400 people with co-op memberships.

The centre began thanks to \$220,000 of seed funding from the Commonwealth government in 2009, which was matched by \$220,000 from the ACT government. According to board members, the seed funds were invaluable in helping them to fit-out the premises and get the co-op established. I would like to use this opportunity to acknowledge the work of Bob McMullan, my predecessor as the member for Fraser; the Minister for Health and Ageing, Nicola Roxon; and the ACT Minister for Health, Katy Gallagher.

The co-op now has five doctors working with it, all recruited from outside the ACT, particularly from the oversupplied UK. This is significantly helping to address the local GP shortage. The centre is now looking to expand, with six doctors, three practice nurses and several support staff. This extended space at Charnwood will be opening within weeks and will enable the co-op to provide space for a bulk-billing pathology provider.

The co-op is opening its second health centre this week in Totterdell Street in the Belconnen town centre. Other organisations are invited as community partners to become involved with the professional health services of the co-op. The co-op board has recently decided to employ a community relationships manager whose key responsibility will be to integrate some of these relationships such as with the Junction Youth Health Service and with Companion House, which supports survivors of torture and trauma.

I would like to acknowledge the hard work of several individuals involved in the co-op: Michael Pilbrow, the chair; Roger Nicoll, the current deputy chair and previous chair; Peter White, the secretary; Brian Frith; Paul Flint; Joanne Courtney; Jenny McGee; and Ross Maxwell. I would like to conclude by acknowledging the skilled volunteers who served for no pay on the original committee and the subsequent board of directors. They had the vision and the commitment to pursue a dream of a community owned health centre rather than complain and wait for someone else to fix the problem.

**Murray Electorate: Home Insulation Program**

**Dr STONE** (Murray) (4.06 pm)—In January this year Ms Rosemary O'Donnell of Mooroopna, a 64-year-old pensioner, had insulation installed in her ceiling under the commonly called pink batts program. She says she had been bullied by a company called Spiffing Solutions. They said she really needed to take advantage of the free government program, so the insulation was installed. Just four days later her ceiling collapsed. This was extremely distressing, as you could imagine, for Ms O'Donnell. Massive damage was done to her furniture inside and she had fibreglass all throughout her home. She also had electrical equipment damaged.

She immediately contacted Spiffing Solutions, who within a few days sent some of their friends, as they call them, to fix the damage to her house. She described them as shoddy and unprofessional. She said they in fact did more damage than the original ceiling collapse. Ms O'Donnell is a recovering stroke victim. She is also suffering from very serious ongoing health issues. She has very limited financial means. Unfortunately, whilst trying to shift this heavy furniture around, because it was covered in fibreglass from the ceiling collapse, she injured her left knee and has had to undergo surgery.

She desperately wants an inspection of her home. She is terrified that more of the ceiling is going to collapse. She has been in touch with the hotline. Of course they said, 'Not a problem. Within 24 hours we'll come and inspect your home.' I wrote to the minister assisting the minister at the time, the Hon. Greg Combet—that was back in March—and said, 'Will you please attend to this woman's problem. She needs an inspection of her property urgently.' Some five months later I got a reply from the Hon. Greg Combet, and he said, 'Look, I understand when contacted by the department in April Ms O'Donnell advised that she no longer required a safety inspection as all necessary rectification work had been completed.' Unfortunately, Ms O'Donnell is still most anxious for an inspection. Her home, she suspects, is still very unsafe with regard to the ceiling staying in place. She has lost a lot of her furniture.

There is a bill here worked out by Bay Building Services for the insurance company which puts the cost at \$14,481.50, which includes new curtains, new carpet, new furniture, cleaning and air conditioning, fixing up ceiling fans and lights, reconnection fees and so on. She does not have the money to cover this. She needs an inspection of her home. She is becoming more and more desperate. She is an elderly pensioner with serious health issues. I beg this government to have a heart. You made a mess of this program. You had a lot of trouble with the people who actually installed the equipment, who themselves were being injured and killed in the process. This elderly lady needs some compassion. She urgently needs an inspection of her home. I suggest very strongly that in a program which was a mark of the shambolic ineptitude of this government something needs to be done. (*Time expired*)

#### **Canberra Electorate: St Mary of the Cross**

**Ms BRODTMANN** (Canberra) (4.09 pm)—I wish to draw the attention of the House to the recent canonisation of St Mary of the Cross and the special significance it has for my electorate. One of the things that so many Canberrans admire about Mother Mary is her legacy on education. Mother Mary realised the power that education has in changing lives for the better and its transformative qualities. Her dedication to educating all, regardless of their ability to pay, is something that guided her throughout her life and led her to form the Sisters of St Joseph of the Sacred Heart. These sisters came from all walks of life and dedicated themselves to the education of young Australians from every part of the country and from every means.

This legacy is continued to this day at St Mary MacKillop Catholic College in my electorate in Tuggeranong. The college is a co-ed school for years 7 to 10, which operates from two campuses. The college is the largest Catholic school in Canberra. The college's motto of faith and courage is drawn from the inspiration of St Mary of the Cross and serves to guide the school in all its activities. St Mary MacKillop Catholic College takes great pride in its name-sake. When the imminent canonisation of St Mary was announced, the school sought feedback from its community and the Catholic Church to change its name from 'MacKillop Catholic College' to 'St Mary MacKillop Catholic College'. That feedback was overwhelm-

ingly positive and the school officially changed its name in January this year to recognise the sainthood of its patron.

To underscore its commitment to its patron, the school also sent a small delegation of staff and students to Rome to witness the ceremony. Principal Michael Lee was joined by assistant principal, Lois White, and students Oliver Oakman, Danica Tagaza, Isabelle Schmidt and Andre Wilks to witness the canonisation mass. Back home, students at both campuses also held special assemblies in honour of the day and received commemorative medals in recognition of the event.

Another activity that has been taking place at the college and other colleges in Canberra is the Gillard government's investment in St Mary MacKillop College and Merici, St Clare's and St Francis Xavier. The Gillard Labor government has provided \$5.7 million in terms of a grant for a trade training centre that will offer a VET pathway for Certificate III in Hospitality. The trade training centre will join the many around the country to provide a year 12 equivalent and better job prospects, and address the critical skill shortages affecting not only Canberra—and I mentioned this yesterday in my 90-second statement—in terms of trade shortages here but also the nation.

#### **Casey Electorate: Active After-school Communities Program**

**Mr ANTHONY SMITH** (Casey) (4.12 pm)—On Thursday, 7 October I had the pleasure of attending the presentation of the Australian Sports Commission's Victorian Super Site Award to the Patch Primary School's out-of-school-hours care service. The Patch Primary School in the Dandenong Ranges and Yarra Valley region within the electorate of Casey won this award. It recognises the outstanding contribution made by primary schools and out-of-school-hours care services in the coordination and delivery of the Australian government's Active After-school Communities Program. Of course—as you will recall, Mr Deputy Speaker Slipper—this program was launched in 2005 by the previous government and aims to improve the physical activity of primary schoolchildren, provide greater opportunities for children to participate in sporting activities that are both safe and fun, and promote local community involvement. The program is an inclusive program where children can participate in many activities that get them active and promote a development and a love for sport.

The Patch Primary School has excelled at helping children and their families to be more active. They have done a fantastic job. They participated in a whole range of sports including fencing, skateboarding, lawn bowls and tennis. It was terrific that the school had developed relationships with local sporting groups in the community, such as the Monbulk netball club and the Monbulk Bowling Club. Their efforts have seen the Patch Primary School receive a Super Site Award trophy and a \$500 voucher for sporting equipment. Congratulations must go to the coordinator of the program, Sheila, for her hard work and dedication. Sheila is supported by a hardworking team of staff and parents who also deserve congratulations and recognition here in this House.

I look forward to the continuation of this wonderful program that was initiated five years ago by the previous government. Can I commend here in the House the work of the staff of the Australian Sports Commission. I met two of the staff there on the day the award was presented, and their enthusiasm, their professionalism and their dedication to seeing this program succeed was obvious for all to see. Without their dedicated work across Australia, but in this

case in particular in the Yarra Valley and the Dandenong Ranges, we would not be seeing the successes that we are seeing with this program.

#### **Hindmarsh Electorate: Employment Conditions**

**Mr GEORGANAS** (Hindmarsh) (4.15 pm)—I rise to speak about allegations of worker mistreatment and intimidation at the Lilydale free-range chicken processing plant located in Wingfield, South Australia. These allegations, which were aired on the ABC television program *Lateline* on Thursday, 21 October, include underpayment, bullying, harassment, racism and breaches of health and safety laws. Many Australians purchase Lilydale free-range chickens because they are concerned about how chickens are treated and their wellbeing during their lives. But what about the lives and the wellbeing of the workers?

Lilydale employs a mainly migrant workforce and many of the workers do not speak English. Many are new arrivals to Australia and are not aware of their rights in the workplace. In the story aired on the ABC, *Lateline* interviewed an ex-Lilydale worker, Anyuon Mabior, who had been sacked after complaining about working conditions. I met with Anyuon some weeks ago after he was introduced to me by Dave Garland, the National Union of Workers' lead organiser in SA. Anyuon is a member of the Sudanese community, which is largely based in my electorate of Hindmarsh. Many other members of the community also work at Lilydale but have been too afraid to speak out. The NUW has been working closely with Anyuon and has collected many statutory declarations detailing workplace conditions, many of which describe practices which many of us would have thought had been relegated to decades past—things like being denied a break after 16 hours of work, or not being paid for hours worked overtime, or being the subject of racist slurs far too vile to repeat in this place.

Workers have also been discouraged from seeking help from the union and many were told not to join or talk to the union or they would be sacked. These messages fly in the face of Australia's fair work legislation and are of great concern. I have since attended and spoken at a rally in support of Lilydale workers organised by the NUW and supported by my state colleague Leesa Vlahos, Janet Giles from SA Unions, and Dr Joseph Masika, the President of the African Communities Council of South Australia.

I am pleased to note that the Fair Work Ombudsman has also taken up the matter and has launched an investigation into Lilydale's parent company, which is the largest chicken processor in Australia and which also controls other major chicken-processing companies. In a first for our new industrial relations system, the Fair Work Ombudsman recently granted the NUW the right to enter the site and inspect time and wage records of all workers. I congratulate the NUW and the Fair Work Ombudsman on their commitment to helping those who cannot help themselves, who cannot speak out or who do not know how to speak out. I look forward to the conclusion of the Fair Work Ombudsman's investigation. Every person in Australia has the right to work safely, to be paid the right wage for their job and to perform their work free of harassment, intimidation, bullying and racism. (*Time expired*)

#### **Cowan Electorate: St Anthony's Catholic Primary School**

**Mr SIMPKINS** (Cowan) (4.18 pm)—On 15 October this year I had the pleasure to once again attend St Anthony's Catholic Primary School in the suburb of Wanneroo within the electorate of Cowan to congratulate the school on their success in the Dorothea Mackellar poetry awards. This is a national set of awards for schools across Australia. There were over 8,000

individual entries and hundreds of entries by schools from the east coast all the way to the west coast. St Anthony's for the second time has done exceptionally well, so I would like to congratulate the staff and students today. The responsibility for the program at the school goes to Sandra Corcoran, one of the teachers, but also ably assisted by Carolyn Papotto, Marie-Anne Bond, John Topliss, Brett Love and Ben Wynne.

The students who actually did the work and were the creative ones, and who did so well, were: Kristina Magoutus, Sian Douglas, Keisha Omar, Melanie Maroney, Thomas Murray, Annette Briffa-Healy, Kate Drummond, Shanelle, Lauren Kincaid and Alex Briffa-Healy. The identified talent group also did very well. The Australian runner-up in the junior primary category was Connor Harrison, so an excellent job by Connor. Others in that group who did very well were: Tiana Puglia; Aoife Corry, who got a commendation for her work; Kelly Shenton, Sophia Corrie, Abigail Maroney and Claire Chong. That is the whole list of students who did very well across the whole competition.

This is not just a school that operates merely in the poetry band; it also has a strong community involvement. The school has operated for 75 years—last Friday was their 75th anniversary. I hope they go very well in their fete this Friday night, the 29th, and can raise quite a bit of money for school projects. This school is very progressive and is very strong in portable digital technology. Also, the year 5 teacher, Mr Brett Love, is one of 81 finalists from Western Australia in the National Excellence in Teaching Awards. This school is well regarded by the people in Wanneroo, because it continues to grow. It has around 360 students and every year more and more students are coming to the school because parents recognise that this is a school of outstanding capacity and doing very well. I congratulate the staff and students and the school community.

#### **Lingiari Electorate: Uluru-Kata Juta**

**Mr SNOWDON** (Lingiari—Minister for Veterans' Affairs, Minister for Defence Science and Personnel and Minister for Indigenous Health) (4.21 pm)—Today at Uluru in Central Australia we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of the handing back of the Uluru and Kata Juta title deeds to the Anangu traditional owners and their almost immediately leaseback of that land which they acquired as a result of the land rights act to the Commonwealth for the enjoyment of the Australian community and the tens of thousands of international visitors who visit each year.

I had the privilege and honour to attend the transfer of that title, the celebration, 25 years ago. I have to say it was a profoundly moving event and a defining moment in our nation's history. It was due to the work of a number of very, very committed Anangu people who drove the process to ensure that the Australian community would get to enjoy Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. Two of those people are still alive, Donald Fraser and Yami Lester. Many of the other people who were involved, the leaders, have now passed away, sadly.

The celebration today not only honours the importance of Indigenous country but is also a very important comment on the Australian community's ability to deal with the importance of Aboriginal spirituality. What the recognition of the title did in the first place, the transfer of the title to the Anangu people and then its lease back to the Commonwealth of Australia, to the people of Australia, was show that Aboriginal people, Anangu people, understood absolutely the imperative of their own culture and priorities as well as the importance of this iconic site to the nation at large.

Today, to celebrate, there is a festival at Uluru. Its theme is 'tjukurpa munu manta kumpungku kanyintjaku', which means 'keeping culture and country strong together'. A lot has happened since that day 25 years ago. Some of it has brought great pride to the Australian nation. In 1987 Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park was listed as a UNESCO World Heritage natural property and in 1994 it was listed as a World Heritage cultural landscape. In 1995 Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park won the Picasso Gold Medal, the highest UNESCO award, for outstanding efforts to preserve the landscape and Anangu culture and for setting new international standards for World Heritage management. It was awarded jointly to Parks Australia and the Anangu Kata Tjuta Board of Management. People get a unique cultural experience in this part of Australia. It is a very, very important day to remember the contribution being made to this nation by the Anangu people of Central Australia.

#### **Higgins Electorate: Education**

**Ms O'DWYER** (Higgins) (4.24 pm)—One of the reasons that I joined the Liberal Party over 14 years ago was that I passionately believed then, as I do today, that it is important to defend choice and opportunity. In my maiden speech I spoke about the importance of education in unlocking opportunities for all Australians, no matter what their background. In no other area is choice more important than in education. The coalition is dedicated to an education system that allows parents to find the school that best suits their children's needs and that provides the best possible chance for them to flourish and achieve.

The Currajong School, in my electorate of Higgins, was established in 1974 as an independent school for students with spectrum disorder associated social and behavioural problems. The school aims to provide a positive environment for students whose needs are unable to be met within the mainstream education system. The school works intensively with children to develop learning and coping strategies, with the aim of equipping them for the transition to mainstream education. It has a great history of successful rehabilitation and fostering strong self-esteem and a positive sense of belonging.

However, the transition is not always successful. In many cases, when Asperger's or spectrum disorder children go into the mainstream schooling system they report high levels of anxiety stemming from the new learning environment and the extra pressure that is applied to them. This anxiety causes problems for the students as well as the teachers, who are often unable to cope effectively with their behaviour. Teachers often view the behaviour as disruptive, which can cause the anxiety to increase over time and impacts directly on children's ability to learn. Likewise, some children will be better suited to a mainstream school environment that has facilities and properly trained teachers available to assist them. They are able to receive the attention they need while continuing to be stimulated by a broad curriculum.

Parents of autism spectrum children are concerned that there is a lack of choice at the secondary school level and that students with social and behavioural problems are finding it difficult to get the appropriate care and reinforcement that they need. Often very bright children go on to achieve academic excellence in the right environment. Under the current system, parents apply for funding associated with their child's condition. Parents have told me that they are concerned that funding is directed to children with severe disabilities rather than children with unrecognised disabilities. Most of the funding is ultimately spent on teachers' aides to assist children throughout the day. However, teachers' aides cannot be there all the time. Parents have said to me that they think it is terribly important that there be a choice of

secondary school for them outside of the mainstream education system. It is incumbent upon us and the state government to seriously consider it. (*Time expired*)

#### **Deakin Electorate: Local Sporting Champions Grants**

**Mr SYMON** (Deakin) (4.27 pm)—I would like to relate to the House the stories of two Local Sporting Champions grants that were recently awarded in the electorate of Deakin. The Local Sporting Champions program is a Labor government initiative designed to provide financial assistance for young people aged 12 to 18 towards the cost of travel, accommodation, uniforms and equipment when competing, coaching or officiating at official national sporting organisation endorsed state or national competitions or School Sport Australia national championships.

Recently I was proud to present five members from the Ringwood Swimming Club with a Local Sporting Champions certificate to recognise their success at a national level. Ringwood Swimming Club received a \$3,000 Local Sporting Champions team grant to help send the team to the state titles in Tasmania. I was pleased to support their application for the grant, as attending the state titles in Tasmania gives the athletes from Ringwood Swimming Club important competitive experience. Ringwood Swimming Club has been active in the local community for over 75 years and helps children and adults in the area to participate in swimming events and develop their talents. Over recent years the club has retained a strong membership base and enjoyed an increasing level of competitive success at both state and national competitions. The number of Ringwood Swimming Club members qualifying and making the finals in state championships has risen significantly and gold, silver and bronze medals have been won across a number of age groups. Along with the swimmers who attended the Tasmanian titles, a number of parents volunteered their time to ensure the team could attend. I would like to thank them for that participation as well.

Competing on a national level is important in the development of sporting careers. I am glad that the Labor government can help local athletes attend national events. Another local recipient of the Local Sporting Champions grants was Liam DeJong. Liam received a \$500 individual grant to assist in his travels to Canberra so that he could compete at the National Sports Acrobatics Championships, representing Victoria. At the national championship, Liam and three fellow acrobats won their competition, which was a great result. He has represented Victoria nationally on three occasions and recently tried out for the National Institute of Circus Arts in Prahran. Liam also works locally, teaching gymnastics at the Burwood United gymnastics squad in East Burwood, where I visited recently to see Liam run through some of his routines. I was very impressed with his dedication and commitment to making it as a gymnast. I am hopeful that he does get into the National Institute of Circus Arts, a result he will know very soon. I commend this excellent federal program. It is yet another example of how the Gillard Labor government is helping to support local communities not only in the electorate of Deakin but across every electorate in Australia.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)**—In accordance with standing order 193, the time for members' constituency statements has concluded.

**AUTONOMOUS SANCTIONS BILL 2010****Second Reading**

Debate resumed from 30 September, on motion by **Mr Rudd**:

That this bill be now read a second time.

**Ms JULIE BISHOP** (Curtin) (4.30 pm)—I rise to speak on the Autonomous Sanctions Bill 2010. This bill was debated in June, prior to the federal election; however, due to the proroguing of the parliament, it has had to be reintroduced. The coalition continues to support this bill, with some slight reservations that I will raise later in my speech. I do not want to repeat verbatim my speech on this bill from June, but I will nevertheless need to cover much of the same ground.

As I noted in the earlier debate, this bill will enable Australia to implement autonomous sanctions without having to rely on legislation that is in fact intended for other purposes. The bill is designed to strengthen Australia's autonomous sanctions regime by allowing greater flexibility in the range of measures Australia can implement beyond those achievable under existing instruments, thus ensuring Australia's autonomous sanctions can match the scope and extent of measures implemented by like-minded states. There is an alternative, United Nations Security Council sanctions regime currently covering 11 nations in addition to terrorist groups such as al-Qaeda and the Taliban. Autonomous sanctions are in addition to the UN Security Council sanctions regime.

This is a stand-alone piece of legislation that gives governments the ability to impose a sanctions regime without resorting to the sometimes messy amendment of other legislation that regulates activities, such as the Banking (Foreign Exchange) Regulations, the Customs (Prohibited Exports) Regulations or other legislation related to the provision of services or software.

The bill also provides a standard penalties regime for those who contravene the provisions of the legislation. This is consistent with the rules applied to the enforcement of UN Security Council sanctions specified under the Charter of the United Nations Act 1945.

Sanctions are a necessary part of the armoury in international relations. They are a useful tool if a nation-state wants to avoid more drastic measures such as resorting to military intervention. They have existed ever since humanity was divided into various groupings and tribes.

I note that sanctions are considered by the Australian people to be a productive tool in foreign policy terms. The Lowy Institute for International Policy recently conducted a poll called *Australia and the world: public opinion and foreign policy*. One question in this poll related to Iran's development of nuclear weapons, and it is interesting to note that after 'diplomatic negotiations', with 85 per cent support, 69 per cent of those surveyed supported 'economic sanctions' as a favoured response to Iran's behaviour.

Australia is not a huge user of the tool, and I think that over time there has been a judicious use of it to make whatever diplomatic point has arisen over time. The coalition believes that autonomous sanctions can, in appropriate circumstances, play an important role in sending clear messages to regimes or countries that their behaviour is unacceptable to the norms of our regions. That is why the coalition supports this bill. It streamlines and improves the ability of the government to impose sanctions against regimes whose behaviour is out of step with accepted international behaviour.

Sanctions are not a solution to every international situation, nor are they generally able to provide rapid changes in aberrant or abhorrent behaviour. They are one of the ways in which the international community can show solidarity with countries where some have adopted behaviour that threatens to undermine stability or threatens their neighbours and beyond. Indeed, only this last week, the issue of a sanctions regime was raised in the national media.

In July this year the Deputy Pro Vice-Chancellor of Monash University, South Africa, Professor Dina Burger, visited Zimbabwe President Robert Mugabe in his office in Harare and reportedly extended to him an invitation to give a guest lecture at one of the university's campuses. Professor Burger is reported to have praised Mr Mugabe's humility. Zimbabwe has been subject to Australian autonomous sanctions since September 2002, targeting the Mugabe regime and its supporters. The sanctions are extensive. According to the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade website, there are sanctions implemented by the Reserve Bank of Australia against targeted financial sanctions involving members or supporters of the Mugabe regime, including senior management officials of state-owned companies. In addition, there are restrictions on visas for travel to Australia by members or supporters of the Mugabe regime, including senior management officials of state-owned companies. There is also screening of all student visa applications from Zimbabwe to identify whether any applicants are the adult children of Zimbabwean individuals subject to Australian travel and financial sanctions. Applications so identified are referred to the Minister for Foreign Affairs for consideration as to whether their presence in Australia would be in Australia's foreign policy interests. There are also an arms embargo, a prohibition of defence links, the downgrading of government-to-government contacts at multilateral forums and the downgrading of cultural links. Monash University has subsequently disowned Professor Burger's actions, and rightly so.

More broadly, in the case of autonomous sanctions imposed by our country, in addition to Zimbabwe, they are in place against Burma, North Korea, Iraq, the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia and Fiji, and they range from financial sanctions to travel restrictions, the suspension of government-to-government links and the like. Autonomous sanctions against Burma have been in place since October 2007 and against members of the Burmese regime, their associates and their supporters. In response to the regime's crackdown on pro-democracy activists in 2007, the former coalition government introduced bans on financial dealings in Australia on about 400 Burmese officials and associates. At the time, Foreign Minister Downer described them as 'the strongest financial measures available under existing Australian legislation against countries or individuals that are not subject to United Nations Security Council sanctions'.

North Korea has been subject to Australian autonomous sanctions since 2006. Autonomous sanctions from Australia were employed against Iran from October 2008 and against the former Federal Republic of Yugoslavia from June 1992, targeting those indicted for or suspected of war crimes during the early 1990s. Autonomous sanctions have been in place against Fiji since December 2006. They are:

... against those responsible for the December 2006 Fiji military coup and senior appointees of Fiji's Interim Government.

Iran has been accused of pursuing nuclear weapons—an accusation denied by the regime—but its ongoing refusal to fully cooperate with the international nuclear inspectors has raised international concerns. This is a critical issue for the whole world, as Israel has threatened

military action against nuclear facilities in Iran, an action that would almost certainly trigger retaliation from Iran and its proxies with a potentially devastating impact on the globe. There is an obvious need for sanctions against Iran to work effectively and for Iran to open up its nuclear program to inspectors who can certify that its program is for peaceful power generation purposes. The consequences of the alternative are too terrible to contemplate.

North Korea, in contrast, has detonated nuclear devices in breach of United Nations Security Council resolutions and remains a source of deep tension in the region. Punitive sanctions have impacted on the regime and the long-suffering people of North Korea but have had limited impact on the behaviour of the regime. Its recent provocative action in allegedly sinking a South Korean navy ship has raised tensions close to breaking point.

We must continue to trust that targeted sanctions can work to bring about a change in the behaviour of rogue regimes around the world. Of course, such sanctions can create a dilemma. They can inflict damage on the target country's population to the point where the moral or humanitarian implications of the sanctions can raise concerns. A case in point is North Korea. While broad based sanctions are called for, a collapse of North Korea would cause a massive flood of refugees into the region. The desired result, the end to North Korea's nuclear program and its provocative behaviour in pursuit of it, must be put in this context.

There is a view that sanctions are more likely to work if there is an organised domestic political opposition force which can build political pressure on the government. However, in the absence of such opposition, sanctions can sometimes bolster domestic public support for a regime that blames an external enemy for all the woes of the nation. Nonetheless, strong sanctions tend to create a political atmosphere of anxiety and paranoia, which greatly increases the possibility of armed conflict.

International economic pressure could also create incentives for authoritarian regimes to be even more repressive towards opposition forces in order to hold on to power. Burma is a prime example. The more pressure from the international community, the more determined the regime seems to be in its efforts to destroy the chances of the main opposition, which had been the National League for Democracy as it was, and its leader Aung San Suu Kyi from taking any role in the country. As I have informed this House on a number of occasions, I met with Aung San Suu Kyi in 1995. I think that any person who has spent any time in her presence could not fail to be overwhelmed by her inspiring and moral example of leadership. The Burmese regime, having been humiliated in the 1989 election when Aung San Suu Kyi's party won 89 per cent of the parliamentary seats, appears ever more determined not to concede to foreign pressure in the event that it weakened its claim, albeit spurious, to legitimacy and popular support.

However, despite these risks and consequences and the dilemmas they can raise, on balance sanctions have proved to be an effective way of encouraging governments to adopt behaviour that is in line with the values of the international community. Historically it is fair to say that sanctions have played an important role in effecting the behaviour of many governments or regimes around the world. While far from perfect, I would argue they have helped avert military conflict in many instances. Sanctions can have a devastating impact on regimes in pursuit of weapons of mass destruction and they did play an important role in preventing Saddam Hussein obtaining nuclear weapons.

While the coalition supports this bill in principle, we propose to refer it to the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee because of our concerns about the domestic privacy implications of the bill. These concerns arise from this passage in the original second reading speech of the then Minister for Foreign Affairs:

... the bill will facilitate access to information for purposes associated with the administration of sanction laws by removing impediments for the sharing of such information within the Commonwealth, and allowing specially designated Commonwealth entities, responsible for the administration and enforcement of sanction laws, to require, by written notice, the production of documents and written information—including under oath—from persons outside of government in order to determine whether a sanction law is being complied with.

The coalition believes that the government should elaborate on this aspect of the bill to satisfy the privacy concerns arising from this passage in the second reading speech. Nonetheless, with that slight reservation, I note that the Autonomous Sanctions Bill 2010 will provide added flexibility to Australia to implement autonomous sanctions that reflect our belief that a type of behaviour is unacceptable and must be changed to avert more serious action. Rather than having to rely on existing legislation to implement autonomous sanctions, Australia will have available to it a more flexible range of foreign policy options to demand a change of behaviour. Subject to the point about referring the passage on privacy considerations to the relevant Senate committee, I commend this bill to the House.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON** (Wills) (4.43 pm)—The Autonomous Sanctions Bill 2010 provides a framework for the implementation in Australia of autonomous sanctions. Autonomous sanctions are punitive measures not involving the use of armed force which a government imposes as a matter of foreign policy, as opposed to an international obligation under a United Nations Security Council decision in situations of international concern. Such situations include the grave repression of the human rights or democratic freedoms of a population by a government or the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or their means of delivery, or internal or international armed conflict. The purpose of the bill we are debating is to strengthen Australia's autonomous sanctions regime by allowing greater flexibility in the range of measures it can implement, thus ensuring Australia's autonomous sanctions match the scope and extent of measures implemented by like-minded countries.

The bill before the House will assist the administration of, and compliance with, sanctions measures by removing distinctions between the scope and extent of autonomous sanctions and United Nations sanction laws. The bill is modelled on the legislation with which Australia implements United Nations Security Council sanctions, the Charter of the United Nations Act 1945, and is intended to be a framework under which regulations are made. Each set of regulations would contain the specific measures to be imposed in response to a particular situation of international concerns.

Autonomous sanctions, either supplementary to or independent of United Nations Security Council sanctions, are likely to play an increasing part in responses of like-minded countries to situations of international concern. Autonomous sanctions measures are intended to achieve three objectives: to limit the adverse consequences of a situation of international concern—for example, by denying access to military or paramilitary goods—to seek to influence those responsible for giving rise to a situation of concern to modify their behaviour to remove the concern; and to penalise those responsible—for example, by denying access to international

travel or to the international financial system. They are highly targeted measures, applied only to the specific governments, individuals or entities, in the form of targeted financial sanctions and travel bans, or to the specific goods and services, such as military goods or goods with a weapons of mass destruction dual use, that are responsible for, or have a nexus to, the situation of international concern. They are applied so as to minimise, to the extent possible, the impact on the general populations of the affected countries. I think it is important that in the national parliament we discuss issues of human rights, and this bill provides that opportunity.

In the area of human rights I would like to focus on two areas of concern: firstly, China, particularly its treatment of Tibet, and, secondly, Iran. I might say something about Burma if time permits. In November 2009 the Fifth World Parliamentarians Convention on Tibet took place in Rome. It was attended by representatives of 30 parliaments around the world. The Australian All-Party Parliamentary Group for Tibet, of which I am a member—and Mr Deputy Speaker Slipper, I know you are also a member—was represented at the convention, which at the end adopted the Rome Declaration. This declaration defines the right of the Tibetan people to their own identity, culture and way of life; reaffirms a strong commitment to the people of Tibet and to the non-violent path they have chosen under the leadership of His Holiness the Dalai Lama; seeks a resolution for Tibet that guarantees genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people within the framework of the Constitution of the Peoples Republic of China; proclaims that the message is not anti Chinese but a statement of support for justice and truth with a sincere conviction that the Tibetan and Chinese peoples can find a way to coexist with mutual respect; and finds that, since 2005, the situation in Tibet has deteriorated due to the government of the Peoples Republic of China's imposition of harsh measures on Tibetans and its harder line taken toward the Dalai Lama and his pursuit of autonomy.

The convention resolved to express support for substantive negotiations between the Chinese government and the representatives of the Dalai Lama towards a meaningful resolution of the Tibet issues with the memorandum on genuine autonomy as a realistic and constructive basis for such negotiations. It resolved to call on governments to urge the Peoples Republic of China to fully respect the Tibetan people's fundamental human rights and freedoms and to commit to engage relevant governments and institutions to ensure that His Holiness the Dalai Lama is welcomed appropriately when meeting with various government leaders and officials. I fully support the Rome Declaration.

The result of the climate change talks in Copenhagen in December also had adverse implications for Tibet and the welfare of its people. The climate change issue is very significant for Tibet. Tibet contains the largest icefields outside of the Arctic and Antarctic and is sometimes referred to as earth's 'third pole'. Melting glaciers are threatening Tibetan villages and damaging a resource depended on by at least a billion people in Asia. The parliamentarians believe that, just as China is essential to successful implementation of global climate change solutions, Tibet is indispensable to China's ability to implement them successfully. China has a lot of power in the modern world, but with power comes responsibility, and I believe China must exercise its new-found power responsibly and act as a good international citizen.

*Amnesty International Report 2010: The State of the World's Human Rights*, has criticised China as responding to dissent and protest with unfair trials and death sentences. Although the statistics are clothed in secrecy, China is still the world's leading executioner. Amnesty International has also previously documented a pattern of torture and other ill-treatment of detain-

ees in Tibet by China's security forces, especially those accused by the Chinese authorities of separatist activities. Moreover, China has long banned independent human rights monitors from Tibet. Amnesty International has in the past called on the United Nations Human Rights Council to urge the Chinese authorities to address Tibetans' long-term grievances, including restrictions on religious practice; persecution for exercising their freedoms of expression, association and assembly; government policies that have weakened their culture and ethnic identity; and their perceived exclusion from the benefits of economic development. I think they are very important concerns.

Human rights abuses in Iran are also a source of great concern. After the presidential election last year in July, Amnesty International reported on the comments at the time by Irene Khan, Amnesty International Secretary General, and the Iranian Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Shirin Ebadi. The report said:

"Three days ago, thousands of people in over 100 cities across the world joined in a Global Day of Action in protest at the numerous arrests, beatings and killings that have accompanied the Iranian authorities' attempt to force through the declared election result, which is so widely disputed," said Irene Khan.

... ..

Irene Khan and Shirin Ebadi cautioned that international attention and efforts must not fade, however intransigent the authorities in Tehran appear.

"People in Iran need international support now more than ever as the political divisions in Tehran play themselves out," said Shirin Ebadi. "International attention and pressure must be sustained and intensified if it is to have impact on those calling the shots in Tehran."

"In particular, the UN needs to play a more determined and decisive role," said Irene Khan. "Through its human rights and other mechanisms, the UN must investigate the violations taking place in Iran and compile evidence that can be used, one day, to bring those responsible to account."

Widespread arbitrary arrest of university students, women, former political prisoners and family members of Iranian dissidents living in Camp Ashraf, situated in Iraq, continues every day. The reports of human rights organisations such as Amnesty International and United Nations bodies about brutal repression by the regime and systematic use of violent torture against women and other political prisoners are shocking and abhorrent and must be strongly condemned by the international community. These things show the regime's fear of its own people. We must work through the United Nations Security Council to encourage the necessary steps that will curtail the Iranian regime. I believe we should also support the Iranian opposition in Camp Ashraf in Iraq. They have been the pioneers of the struggle for human rights, democracy and equality for the past three decades in Iran, and that deadly and violent attack of the Iraqi armed forces against defenceless residents at this camp at the behest of the Iranian regime in late July 2009 is a major concern to the Iranian community here in Australia.

Just as worryingly, the Iranian regime has also been engaged in nuclear and ballistic missile activity. It has locked out the inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency, whose job it is to make sure countries producing nuclear power to generate electricity are not also trying to produce nuclear weapons. In November last year, the IAEA board of governors adopted a resolution which noted that Iran continued to defy relevant IAEA and UN Security Council resolutions; had constructed an enrichment facility 'in breach of its obligation to suspend all enrichment related activities' and had failed to notify the IAEA of the facility until September 2009; and had not implemented the additional protocol or cooperated with the

IAEA in connection with remaining issues of concern. The board of governors also noted that the Director General continued to be unable to verify that Iran's program is for exclusively peaceful purposes and called on Iran to fully comply with its obligations and engage with the agency.

In February this year, Iran announced that it had resumed uranium enrichment. The US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, is seeking United Nations sanctions on Iran to force it to rein in its nuclear program. I support economic sanctions. They were successful in South Africa and helpful in Libya. I note reports that China, which is a veto-wielding member of the UN Security Council, has resisted pressure from the US and other members to back tougher penalties against Iran, apparently because Iran is China's third largest source of crude oil. This is not good enough and I believe, as I have mentioned earlier, that China needs to be a responsible international citizen in its handling of nuclear nonproliferation, climate change and human rights issues. The international community should support moves within Iran towards democracy, human rights and women's rights. It should not turn a blind eye to religious fundamentalism, regular abuses of human rights and barbaric practices such as public executions and moves to obtain nuclear weapons.

In February, Gareth Evans expressed support for financial sanctions against Iran. Such sanctions inhibit the flow of capital and hamper both trade financing and investment. Gareth Evans also called for targeted sanctions against key individuals, and I support such action. The issue of human rights violations around the world is a growing concern, and it is important that emerging powers respect human rights rather than seeking only an economic dividend or opportunistic political influence from their international relations.

In the time remaining to me, I want to make a few remarks about the situation in Burma as well, and I note that the Deputy Leader of the Opposition has also done so. Burma is a country with a very poor track record in relation to human rights and human rights abuses. It has been said that Burma's oil and gas industry is linked to human rights abuses. This has been said by the ILO—the International Labour Organisation—the UN special rapporteur on human rights abuses in Burma and the International Tribunal on Crimes Against Women of Burma. There are Australian companies—certainly Australia's Twinza Oil—currently doing exploration for oil and gas in Burma, and concern has been expressed to me that, should Twinza Oil's project move forward, it is likely that this would be accompanied by a pipeline which will cause more Burmese soldiers to be deployed along the pipeline, resulting in increased human rights violations against villagers. It is also estimated that the project would earn something like US\$2½ billion over its lifetime, money which would help fund Burma's military dictatorship, one of the worst military regimes and violators of human rights in the world. At present there is nothing to stop Australian companies like Twinza Oil investing in Burma despite the severe negative impacts and direct links to human rights violations that these projects have. Targeted sanctions would stop companies like Twinza Oil profiting from the oppression of others. I believe that we need to do everything that we can to prevent human rights violations in Burma and to encourage that regime to move down a democratic and pluralist path. I believe that this is a good piece of legislation; it has my support and I commend the bill to the House.

**Mr ROBERT** (Fadden) (4.58 pm)—I rise to make a few brief comments on the Autonomous Sanctions Bill 2010. The purpose of the bill is to strengthen Australia's autonomous

sanctions regime by allowing greater flexibility in the range of measures that Australia can seek to implement, therefore allowing the sanctions which we can autonomously—that is, by ourselves—put in place to match the scope and range of sanctions by other like-minded countries.

Suffice it to say—it is fair—that we live in a very uncertain world. If anyone was ever unsure about that, they should cast their mind back to 1986, the International Year of Peace, when no fewer than 46 wars ravaged the globe. Today war continues to be a scourge on our world with even more conflict globally. I think everyone would concede that when countries descend into chaos and war, horror always follows. To send young men and women into harm's way is not something that an executive would seek to do lightly. We all acknowledge that at times the profession of arms is indeed necessary, but it behoves the executive and, indeed, all parliamentarians to keep themselves accountable and to ensure that we do everything possible before engaging in that ultimate battle of wills that is armed combat. Indeed, armed combat should be absolutely the last resort.

We should be looking at any number of options for us to take forward before resorting to force. Unfortunately, the reality is that, whilst we do everything to secure our borders, our national interests and our way of life, force at times is necessary. But this bill is all about considering what we do before the application of force. One of the key measures that needs to be considered before force is used has to be the use of sanctions, of economic might, of political muscle and of the strength of our argument and our ideas backed up by the strength of our commerce to achieve our political end state before we engage in that ultimate battle of wills. This is the role of sanctions.

As we know, there are United Nations imposed sanctions whereby the UN seeks and passes a resolution for sanctions against a particular nation. Of course, there are autonomous sanctions—sanctions imposed by individual countries outside of the multinational arena. In the case of Australia, we currently have a range of sanctions in place against countries such as Burma, North Korea, Zimbabwe, Iran and, more locally, Fiji. These sanctions range from financial sanctions to travel restrictions, suspension of government-to-government links, not allowing our ambassadors to reside in certain countries and so on.

The purpose of this range of sanctions is to send a very clear message—that we as a nation will seek to stand up to tyranny, that we will not allow other countries to sink into anarchy, that we will protect the rights of democracy and that we will set an example of a First World nation as it seeks to do what it can to bring about a world freer from the threats of violence, disease and hunger. Sanctions are about saying, 'We will play a responsible part in the rule of nations and the rule of law globally.' This is why various governments have moved to put sanctions in place against such dictatorial and brutal regimes as we find with the military junta in Burma, North Korea, Mugabe in Zimbabwe and Iran. We also seek to place sanctions against nations where constitutional democracy has unfortunately failed, like in Fiji.

The challenge is that currently sanctions are imposed by relying on legislation that is, frankly, intended for other purposes. I thought the Minister for Foreign Affairs in his original second reading speech gave a very good example of where Australia currently uses a hodge-podge of legislation to achieve that. He noted that Australian financial sanctions are imposed autonomously by Australia relying on the Banking (Foreign Exchange) Regulations Act 1959. These regulations were originally promulgated for the protection of our nation's currency and

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the regulation of our foreign currency reserves. However, we have used that bill to provide the basis for financial sanctions against some of the nations of the world. If that is not creative, I am not too sure what is.

The purpose of the bill today is to move beyond the creative and to put in place a bill that allows a range of autonomous sanctions to be applied in their own right. It is to provide flexibility and responsiveness in imposing sanctions from our nation on a range of countries, without having to rely on a raft of other legislation that frankly does not fit the purpose. Providing this flexibility and giving the executive the vehicle and the powers it needs to appropriately and legally impose sanctions for the betterment of parts of the world is sensible, right and supported.

Sanctions where appropriate can actually achieve end states that other areas of governance, actions or talk cannot. There are numerous examples of where sanctions have been the appropriate course applied to move a foreign government towards a better way of governance. The coalition believes autonomous sanctions can play a very significant part in sending clear messages. If we look at the access regimes of Iran, North Korea and Burma, regimes where democracy is dented, where human rights are violated, where independent political parties seeking to represent people are not allowed and where trade unions are not permitted, for these countries it is absolutely appropriate for a nation like Australia to seek to use sanctions to send a very clear message—that freedom is not just for the few; freedom is for all.

People in all countries must be free to assemble under trade unions. I know you may be shocked to hear that from me, as a great Liberal, but I actually take some pride in fighting for the rights of people to assemble under a trade union. People have that right and they should have the right to seek to come together. That is a choice and freedom they should have. They should not be pushed into a trade union. There should not be laws that force them into a trade union. There should not be rules that say, 'You must collectively bargain with a trade union and you have no choice.' But freedom to gather, collect and be represented is a freedom worth fighting for.

People should have the right to join a political party. They should have the right to seek office. They should have the right to bring up their families free from restrictions from the state. They should have the right to seek office and change in their nation. People should have the right of free speech, cognisant of the needs of others. People should have the right to travel and rights of expression and religion. These are fundamental and basic freedoms that any First World nation considers just and right to stand up for. People should be able to enjoy freedom in all its realms and all its wonders, as a First World nation does.

We as a nation are not ignorant of the plight of others, nor do we ignore them and turn the other cheek. We will seek to use every measure at our disposal that is sensible, appropriate and warranted to achieve the end of sending a clear, appropriate and compassionate message—that, whilst we care for the people of other nations, at times we do not care for their unelected, dictatorial representatives. Frankly, I would rather see the use of sanctions to achieve a political end state than seek to continue to rely on force.

I am not blind to the fact that force is sometimes required, that it can be all too necessary. I am cognisant that as we speak there are some 3,300 Australian combat men and women deployed overseas on a range of operations from the Sinai to Egypt, the Sudan, the Solomons, East Timor, the wider Middle East, the HMAS *Melbourne* in the Gulf and Afghanistan in

combat seeking to assist, help and support people who are suffering under dictatorial, oppressive and brutal regimes and insurgencies.

There is indeed a time for war. I am not blind to that fact. I understand the price of peace is eternal vigilance. There is no way for us to move away from that necessity when it is required. But putting together a platform that allows the first step to be a range of sanctions that does not require us to rest on a range of disparate legislation is clearly the first step.

I note that a range of privacy concerns on this bill have been raised by the coalition. I believe the bill is being referred to a Senate inquiry to further examine some of these issues should they arise, noting that the bill facilitates access to information for purposes to allow the bill to be enacted. Whilst on the surface this may well seem appropriate, the due course of parliamentary oversight does require the bill to be analysed in greater detail, and I certainly applaud the Senate for taking that move.

The Autonomous Sanctions Bill 2010 in its intent will seek to provide an appropriate framework for the executive to undertake the role of seeking to preserve freedom and protect the rights of individuals by first seeking sanctions. It enjoys our support but clearly we reserve our right to move amendments should the Senate committee report otherwise.

**Mr DANBY** (Melbourne Ports) (5.08 pm)—I am pleased to have this opportunity to speak on the Autonomous Sanctions Bill 2010 and I commend the Australian government for bringing this important piece of legislation forward. Australia is a founding member of the United Nations and all Australian governments have been supporters of the UN when it has sought to impose sanctions on regimes which commit aggression against neighbours, threaten the peace of the world or violate human rights.

The sad fact is that, because of the veto power enjoyed by permanent members of the Security Council, the UN is frequently unable to act as we know it should against certain regimes. In recent times both China and Russia have used their veto power to protect their friends and clients from scrutiny and to shield them from sanctions. Some of the world's worst regimes, such as North Korea, Zimbabwe, Sudan, Cuba, Burma and Iran, are constantly in violation of the principles of the UN charter, but automatic majorities at the General Assembly and the Human Rights Council enable them to protect themselves. Some threaten their neighbours with aggression and develop weapons of mass destruction. Some support terrorist organisations in other countries and export arms to rogue regimes. All of them oppress their own people. Unfortunately, because of the politics of the Security Council, the UN is usually unable to apply effective sanctions against these regimes. In these circumstances, it is important that democratic countries have the means to apply their own sanctions.

This bill strengthens the legal base of Australia's autonomous sanctions system. The objects of applying targeted, autonomous sanctions on the regime in Tehran, for instance, are to, firstly, limit the harmful consequences of the actions of a government against which the sanctions are being applied; secondly, influence the government in question to modify its behaviour; and, thirdly, penalise those individuals responsible for threatening the peace of the world or violating human rights, while not penalising most Persians, the history and culture of whom Australians only have respect for.

Most importantly, this bill makes it an offence under Australian law to contravene sanctions law. When committed by an individual the offence will be punishable by 10 years imprison-

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ment or else by a large fine. When committed by a corporation it will be punishable by a maximum fine three times the value of the relevant transaction or transactions. This is important because long experience has shown us that when trade or other economic sanctions are imposed on a regime this sometimes creates an economic incentive for individuals or corporations to assist the regime by evading these sanctions. It is therefore important to create a negative disincentive in the form of a threat of heavy fines or even imprisonment to deter both individuals and corporations from trying to evade or sabotage sanctions. The bill makes it clear that sanctions busting will be a serious offence in Australia.

I now want to turn to what I believe is the most serious situation threatening the peace of the world at present and its relationship to these autonomous sanctions—that is, the determination of the Islamist theocratic regime in Iran to develop nuclear weapons and to threaten their use against neighbouring states. This situation has the potential to be the most dangerous threat the world has faced since the Cuban missile crisis half a century ago. Iran has not ratified the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty and continues to skirt its obligations under the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

On 31 May this year the International Atomic Energy Agency reported that Iran had expanded its atomic work, with its low-enriched uranium growing to 2.4 tonnes. Iran has been enriching uranium to 20 per cent, taking it closer to the weapons grade it needs for atomic weapons. The International Atomic Energy Agency shows that Iran is pushing ahead with higher level enrichment and continually failing to answer the agency's questions about the military dimensions of its nuclear work. Iran has failed to comply with UN Security Council resolutions 1737, 1747, 1803 and 1835 calling for Iran to cooperate with the International Atomic Energy Agency and to suspend its proliferation without delay.

What makes the 31 May report most disturbing, however, is that the International Atomic Energy Agency and its nuclear inspectors have declared that Iran has now produced a stockpile of nuclear fuel that experts say would be enough to make two nuclear weapons. This comes on top of the Tehran administration unveiling a third generation domestically built centrifuge that enables much faster enrichment of uranium and reports that they have a four-year plan to test a neutron trigger, the component of a nuclear bomb that triggers an explosion. My view is that unless the world shows itself willing to apply serious sanctions on the regime in Tehran, sanctions strong enough to make the regime change its course, there is a real danger that Iran's behaviour will lead to a regional war, with totally unpredictable consequences.

Since 1945 the world has lived with nuclear weapons. During the Cold War there was a 'balance of terror', and the appropriate terminology was 'mutually assured destruction', MAD, the acronym which I think many people thought macabrely apposite. MAD and the balance restrained both the US and the USSR from considering a first use of nuclear weapons, although I do not believe at any stage either side contemplated it, because after all these were two big superpowers, two rational powers that would not want to contemplate their own destruction or their people's destruction. However, when we look at Iran, we see a completely new situation. Since the eighties the Iranian regime has persisted in developing nuclear capacity. Despite the regime's claim that this was for peaceful purposes, the program is more consistent with weapons development, and is shrouded in such secrecy that no-one really doubts that Iran's objective is the development of atomic weapons.

The Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, Yukiya Amano, said earlier this year:

Iran is a special case because, among other things, of the existence of issues related to possible military dimensions to its nuclear programme.

Iran has not provided the necessary cooperation to permit the agency to confirm that all nuclear material is for peaceful activities. The obvious question therefore is: what does Iran want these nuclear weapons for? President Ahmadinejad has made no secret of the answer to this question. Since he took office in 2005 he has made a series of inflammatory statements calling for the destruction of the state of Israel, one of Persia's neighbours in the Middle East. One of the best-known statements made in October 2005 was:

Our dear Imam—

that is, Ayatollah Khomeini—

said that the occupying regime must be wiped off the map for great justice and this was a very wise statement. We cannot compromise over the issue of Palestine.

... ..

I have no doubt that the new wave that has started in Palestine, and we witness it in the Islamic world too, will eliminate this disgraceful stain from the Islamic world.

Two years later, in October 2007, the Iranian newsagency reported Ahmadinejad's Jerusalem Day speech in which he said:

The zionists—

that is the 5.8 million Jewish inhabitants of Israel—

should be resettled in Europe or "big lands such as Canada and Alaska".

He has made many similar statements. So have many leaders of the Iranian regime. In 2008 he said:

... the Zionist Regime that is a usurper and illegitimate regime and a cancerous tumor should be wiped off the map.

On the 60th anniversary, in 2008, he said:

Those who think they can revive the stinking corpse of the usurping and fake Israeli regime by throwing a birthday party are seriously mistaken.

He also said:

Today, the reasons for the Zionist regime's existence is questioned and this regime is on its way to annihilation.

Ahmadinejad's repeated denial of the historical reality of the Nazi genocide of European Jewry must also be seen in this context.

With Iran we have a unique situation. We have a regime which is developing nuclear weapons and whose head of state has publicly and repeatedly called for a neighbouring state to be wiped off the map. This is not a regime that shrinks from violence. Last year the regime blatantly rigged the presidential elections which returned Ahmadinejad and his gang for another term. When the students and the young people of Tehran took to the streets in protest, the regime's brutal thugs, the Basaj—very much like the SA, the Sturmabteilung, or SR, in Germany under the Nazi regime—attacked them, killing 70 protesters and throwing hundreds

into jails. There have been horrific stories from Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch of the torture and rape of hundreds of Iran's best and most elite young people of Iran.

If the world wishes to preserve peace in the Middle East region indeed the whole world, the international community needs to seriously address the issue of Iran's steady march towards the acquisition of nuclear weapons. President Barack Obama and his administration have a clear understanding of the danger that Iran poses to the peace of the world. President Obama has worked very patiently to persuade members of the Security Council to vote for a new round of sanctions, the fourth round since 2006. Winning support for these sanctions was far from easy. The main difficulty was, as always, persuading Russia and China that effective sanctions were the only way to respond to the Iranian regime's continuing refusal to abide by Security Council demands that it halt its nuclear program.

The UN Security Council resolution 1929 on sanctions focuses on three targets: first, the Iranian Revolutionary Guards, which are a major pillar of the theocratic regime and which have enormous business interests; second, Iran's shipping industry; and, third, its banks. In light of the passing of UN resolution 1929, the Obama administration on 16 June imposed its own sanctions on two top commanders of the Revolutionary Guards, five front companies of the Iranian state shipping line as well as 71 ships with names that had been changed to undermine previous sanctions.

Australia joined the United States, the European Union, Japan and South Korea in imposing autonomous sanctions on Iran. Australia has imposed autonomous sanctions on Iran since October 2008 and this legislation will bring a total of 21 Iranian individuals and 20 Iranian organisations subject to Australian autonomous sanctions. The two additional organisations are Bank Mellat, one of the four designated banks under the UN Security Council resolutions, and the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line.

Earlier this year, using powers afforded to him under the Weapons Of Mass Destruction (Prevention Of Proliferation) Act, the Minister for Defence blocked and issued prohibition orders on three companies which sought to export goods that could be used in the development, production, acquisition and stockpiling of weapons. To be effective, sanctions must bring home to the ruling elite that there is a personal economic cost to them in continuing to back such a regime, which is dragging its country and 74 million people towards war. There is plenty of evidence of how Iran has been successfully evading the previous sanctions—for example, by rebranding its shipping fleet so that ships no longer appear to be Iranian owned. I hope these sanctions succeed in diverting Iran from this course.

Australia has done all it can to see that Security Council sanctions against Iran have been implemented, and we should also look at whatever ways there may be of using the powers contained in this bill to impose such sanctions on Iran. The bill gives us a legal framework to impose and enforce effective sanctions. We should explore the best way in which this can be done. We must also continue to put pressure on foreign companies and banks that continue to help Iran skirt UN sanctions. Forty-one companies have helped develop Iran's oil and gas sector, which accounts for more than half of the Iranian government's revenues.

The US House of Representatives and Senate have passed legislation aimed at strengthening sanctions on companies doing business with Iran, leading to a number announcing that they will end their operations in Iran. European insurance firms Allianz, Munich RE and Hanover RE have committed to ending business with Iran. Multinational firms such as Total,

BP, Royal Dutch Shell, Glencore and Vitol have ended their refined petroleum trade or energy investments in Iran and in July this year Iran's gasoline imports were down 50 per cent. On 1 October, European oil firms, France's Total, Anglo-Dutch Shell, Norway's Statoil and Italy's Eni pledged to stop investing in Iran. Australian sanctions, too, are biting hard on Iran. The Sydney based engineering contractor, Wolsey Parsons, has announced that it will not accept any more work in Iran.

Australia has pressured and must continue to pressure its own companies not to deal with the Iranians, and the way to do that is by publicly calling them out. We must also do this with banks that help Iran curb international sanctions. UN resolutions 1747 and 1929 designate four Iranian banks as banks that help Iran's proliferation activities. Those four banks are Bank Sepah, Bank Melli, Bank Saderat and the First East Export Bank, a subsidiary of the Iranian Mellat Bank. Australia, under these resolutions, already imposes sanctions on these banks, but we should be doing everything in our power to ensure that Australian financial institutions do not indirectly involve themselves with these subsidiary banks.

This bill strengthens Australia's ability to impose and effectively enforce sanctions against regimes which defy international law, threaten their neighbours and oppress people. I welcome this and hope we make effective use of the powers which this bill creates. I commend the bill to the House.

**Mr RUDD** (Griffith—Minister for Foreign Affairs) (5.22 pm)—in reply—In concluding this debate on the Autonomous Sanctions Bill 2010, it is appropriate to restate the importance of autonomous sanctions in international diplomacy. Autonomous sanctions are specifically targeted measures that are intended to apply pressure on regimes engaging in behaviour of serious international concern. The passage of this bill will ensure that Australia's autonomous sanctions measures can be implemented and enforced under a single legislative framework, doing away with the need to rely upon existing instruments designed for other purposes.

I note the thoughtful and considered views in support of the bill expressed by members from both sides, including the member for Wills, the member for Melbourne Ports, the member for Fadden and the Deputy Leader of the Opposition. I acknowledge again the important matter of the domestic privacy implications of the bill raised by the Deputy Leader of the Opposition during the previous debate. It is appropriate to reassure the House that privacy considerations were very much at the forefront during the drafting of the bill. I am aware that the Senate Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Legislation Committee intends to conduct an inquiry into this bill and I look forward to the outcomes of that inquiry.

In applying autonomous sanctions, the government must achieve a balance between measures sufficiently strong to be felt by those in power whom we seek to influence and be sufficiently targeted to minimise any unintended consequences for the ordinary citizens of the country concerned. The government must also be responsive to changes in the dynamics of a political situation to ensure that the sanctions measures continue to be a force for positive change. The bill will provide the government with the necessary flexibility to calibrate autonomous sanctions measures to ensure they remain relevant and effective. The government is sensitive to those who believe Australia's autonomous sanctions should be broader than at present, targeting key economic sectors that sustain authoritarian regimes or which fund destabilising activities. The government is also sensitive to concerns that autonomous sanctions

have the potential to disadvantage Australian businesses competing against countries which do not employ such measures.

In late May of this year the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, together with Aus-trade, brought together representatives of industry and civil society in every mainland state of Australia and territory capital to discuss Australia's autonomous sanctions regime and the purposes and content of this bill. As the only goods presently subject to the autonomous sanctions restrictions are military goods, the Defence Export Control Office participated in these discussions as well. What these discussions showed was an understanding and acceptance of the role of autonomous sanctions and a commitment from industry to ensure compliance with these measures. The department will continue to engage with Australian industry and civil society on the implementation of this bill. I commend the bill to the House.

Question agreed to.

Bill read a second time.

Ordered that the bill be reported to the House without amendment.

#### MINISTERIAL STATEMENTS

##### Afghanistan

Debate resumed from 25 October, on motion by **Mr Stephen Smith**:

That the House take note of the document.

**Mr DANBY** (Melbourne Ports) (5.26 pm)—Before the Prime Minister visited Afghanistan, she attended the military funerals of many Australian soldiers killed in action there. At the request of the then Minister for Defence, I too partook in the funeral arrangements for the first reservist killed in action since World War II, Private Greg Sher. Obviously, he died in Afghanistan. Like the Prime Minister, nothing I have done as an MP has been as difficult as that solemn duty of participating with the Prime Minister in the Sher funeral. I have regarded it as my important duty to stay in contact with his family, his dear parents, Felix and Yvonne, ever since.

My judgment is that most of the families of the fallen service personnel, and certainly most of our troops in theatre, support the continuing mission in Afghanistan. Frankly, it is offensive and patronising to minimise their role by claiming that 'the views of our enthusiastic diggers and operational level commanders are obviously important but they are only one perspective when it comes to understanding Australia's strategic interests and the most sensible ways to achieve them', as the member for Denison did. In the real world there are many top analysts, apart from the leadership of the government and the opposition, who share their views of Australia's service personnel. I have been a supporter of the Afghanistan commitment since the ANZUS treaty was invoked after 3,000 Americans and 10 Australians, amongst others, were murdered on 11 September 2001. Afghanistan was used as the base for al-Qaeda—which in Arabic actually means 'the base'—from which the attack on America was organised.

Only someone unfamiliar with members of this House would suggest that we are here robotically following some party orders rather than authentically representing our own views on this issue. For those Johnny-come-latelies, I spoke last year very strongly to condemn the blatant rigging of the presidential election in Afghanistan and the rampant corruption with which the Karzai administration has been associated. Whether it is Karzai's dubious brother, the

Governor of Kandahar, or the disgusting admission in today's newspapers that his chief of staff accepts brown bags of cash from the theocrats in Iran, many Australians—even those who support the mission—will question whether such expenditure of the blood and treasure of Australians is worth the support of a government that allows such corruption.

For years, we have had to endure the smart alec parrot calls of the former foreign minister, Mr Downer, about cutting and running from Iraq. Now, during this debate, I discover that he agrees with the Greens and in fact told the palaeoconservative weekly, the *Spectator*:

That goal was achieved. Al-Qaeda was destroyed in Afghanistan.

The member for Denison is even more extreme than Mr Downer. He suggests that the view of Afghanistan as 'a launching pad for Islamic terrorism is no longer relevant'. That is not the view of Australia's military chiefs or of the Afghan theatre commander, US General David Petraeus. Our Prime Minister, Julia Gillard, is more measured. She has said:

... our vital national interests, in preventing Afghanistan being a safe haven for terrorists who attack us and in supporting our ally, do not end with transition. Our aim is that the new international strategy sees a functioning Afghan state become able to assume responsibility for preventing the country from being a safe haven for terrorists.

The Minister for Defence, Stephen Smith, reiterated this more balanced approach when he said:

Terrorism in Afghanistan and in its neighbourhood remains a real threat.

... ..

Our fundamental goal is to prevent Afghanistan from again being used by terrorists to plan and train for terrorist attacks on innocent civilians.

Since 2001, over 100 Australians have been killed in terrorist attacks—in 9-11, Bali, Jakarta and the London bombings. Most of the people who planned and carried out these attacks were trained in Afghanistan, and some of those attacks were planned and funded from Afghanistan. Jemaah Islamiah, the author of the Bali bombings, is the Asian affiliate of al-Qaeda. Many of its operatives were trained in Afghanistan. In fact, among terrorists they are called 'the Afghanis', which shows their stature, if that can be called stature.

Time after time, terrorists who have now been jailed for their crimes in Australia have come from Lashkar-e-Taiba, which was responsible for the attack on Mumbai in 2008. These people have tried to attack Australia. Thankfully, we have laws that have enabled them to be arrested, charged, tried fairly, found guilty and convicted. I am pleased to see that the Victorian Court of Appeal recently confirmed that Mr Benbrika will stay in jail for another 15 years.

It is true is that all of these organisations do not operate solely out of Afghanistan. They have outposts in Somalia, Yemen and the southern Philippines. There is no doubt that Afghanistan and the Pakistan border region is the jihadist 'terror central'. In contrast to some of the non-experts who minimise the insurgency, top counterinsurgency specialist Australian Colonel David Kilcullen hit the nail on the head on *Lateline* on 4 October this year. He said:

We're here because the Taliban pose a threat to regional stability. And in Pakistan we have 100 nuclear weapons, Al-Qaeda headquarters and a very strong Taliban movement, and that's the threat that we're really focussing on, that regional threat which could have very significant implications if we fail.

This is their safe haven, their base camp and their chief training area in the south of Afghanistan. If we can deny them the free use of this area, we can prevent them from gaining control of the whole of Afghanistan. That will inflict heavy defeat on them. This is the aim of Australia, the US and the international security force. The idea is for the international security force to let the military surge degrade the Taliban and the al-Qaeda command structure, to stand up the Afghan National Army and police and to build a social network for the Afghan government so that foreign forces can slowly withdraw.

The Afghan government says that it wishes to take security control of the country from 2014. That is the time when the training of the Afghan 4th Brigade—Kandak, as it is called—in Oruzgan province by the Australians will be completed. If, on the other hand, we withdraw ignominiously from Afghanistan it will be a huge victory for the terror network. It will inspire them to new attacks. It will make it easier for them to prepare and mount such attacks. We and our allies may stop suffering casualties on the battlefield, but we have only to look at the Swat Valley in Pakistan, where the Pakistani government prematurely withdrew, to see the descent into Dante's inferno that would happen if we were to take the advice of some of the people in the House. All police, teachers and social workers had their throats cut; all girls' schools were blown up. That is what happened when the Taliban took over Swat. There will be more victims of terrorist attacks like those in Bali and Mumbai if al-Qaeda is allowed to re-establish itself in Afghanistan.

We should also remember that although we are fighting in Afghanistan in the interests of our own security, it is not all we are fighting for. There are 28 million people in Afghanistan who over the past nine years have known a greater measure of freedom than ever before in their history. This is particularly true of Afghan women and girls, who were denied the most elementary rights under the Taliban regime and who will suffer if the Taliban return. As my colleague and good friend the member for Eden-Monaro, Dr Mike Kelly, said in his standout speech—the best speech made in this debate—we have achieved much in Afghanistan since 2005 through assisting with the infrastructure of schools, health services and trade-training facilities, as well as through providing security in Oruzgan province. In contrast to what the member for Denison suggested, we are providing extremely effective training for the Afghan National Army 4th Brigade. As Dr Kelly pointed out, our mission is to make ourselves eventually redundant, not to create a dependency.

On the ABC's *Lateline*, Colonel David Kilcullen echoed Dr Kelly's words. Speaking on the importance of our training of the 4th Brigade, he said:

... but the way that the combined team Oruzgan has been stood up and in particular the good progress that the Afghan National Army, Kandaks, which our guys are working with, have made, I think has gone a long way to fill that gap.

The member for Denison may have minimised the ADF's progress in Oruzgan but by contrast Colonel Kilcullen praised the performance of our troops, saying:

The Afghan Army's actually had some pretty good growth this year and I think we've seen that growth translated, particularly in the Australian sector, into greatly improved performance and effectiveness on the part of the guys that our people are training.

The Greens political party have argued that the west cannot deliver democracy in Afghanistan. It is hard to see how they can be so confident as they have neither contradicted reports that they have never requested a briefing on our role in Afghanistan, nor have they been to the

country. It is a shame that the Greens political party have not availed themselves of opportunities to go to Afghanistan under the parliamentary defence program over the last few years. Senator Bob Brown is a man whom I admire; he is a person of courage. He once went on the run from Chinese communist authorities in Lhasa, the capital of Tibet. I urge him and his political associates to take this issue more seriously. They should stare into the face of Islamist extremism and see if they continue to hold the same view about leaving Afghanistan to these clerico-fascists.

US President, Barack Obama, has stated that the coalition strategy is an approach tied to the 'core goal of disrupting, dismantling and eventually defeating al-Qaeda and preventing al-Qaeda's return to safe haven in Afghanistan or Pakistan.' As the perceptive foreign editor of the *Australian*, Greg Sheridan, explained of Obama's strategy on 7 October:

Instead he aims to punch back hard against the Taliban, keep al-Qa'ida from coming back, train the Afghan security forces and give the Afghans a shot at running a half decent government.

Withdrawing from Afghanistan before we have been able to create a situation in which the current government has at least a fighting chance of survival will mean deserting the millions of people for whom we have been able to provide at least some measure of security and freedom over the past nine years. I think this House ought to think carefully before it supports such a step. Dr Kelly, the member for Eden-Monaro, made the salient point:

It never ceases to amaze me that those who are quite rightly passionate in the defence of asylum seekers from Afghanistan are not prepared to extend their compassion to the people who remain. Are not the women and children of Afghanistan deserving of our best efforts to prevent a return to the brutalisation of the Taliban years? The silence of some activists against Islamist extremism shocks me, as this extremism should be total anathema to the agenda of liberals and social democrats.

The House ought to consider how many of those people will eventually arrive at our borders as refugees if Afghanistan falls to the Taliban. The last time the Taliban was in power in Afghanistan there were seven million Afghan refugees in Pakistan and Iran, and those refugee camps are the source of many of the asylum seekers now trying to reach Australia. If the Taliban returns to power, that trickle of people will become a flood.

The tough-minded, Left orientated author David Burchell, and academic at the University of Western Sydney, said:

When it comes to evil regimes, the Taliban in Afghanistan stands front and centre—  
and that the conflict is really—

a primal contest between universal human values and an atavistic medievalism, where the latter is too often winning out over the former because, encased in our cocoon of high minded complacent, and habituated to experiencing the world as a theatre for our private moral dramas, we no longer really care.

In her opening statement on Afghanistan, Prime Minister Julia Gillard spoke of attending the funerals of those who have lost their lives serving our nation there. The Prime Minister went on to quote the great Australian poet James McAuley:

I never shrank with fear  
But fought the monsters of the lower world  
Clearing a little space, and time, and light  
For men to live in peace

I am proud of the tough stance the Prime Minister is taking. I am proud of her supporting our brave men and women fighting on behalf of this nation. I am proud of Australia's involvement in Afghanistan, despite all of my doubts about the corrupt government in power there, views that I make very clear to the Afghan ambassador and to the various people that we have access to in this parliament.

Australia squarely confronted the monstrous Taliban, which blew up the Bamiyan Buddhas, who stood in Afghanistan in respect of another culture for thousands of years; who used a UN sports grounds to flay, then stone to death women; who denied girls education; whose horrifying treatment of minorities were explored in such deeply troubling films as *Kandahar* and the *Kite Runner*. I am fully conscious of the fact that this problem can never be solved by Australia alone. I am fully conscious of the fact that our great ally, the United States, has a plan for standing up with the Afghan government and the Afghan security forces, and that we cannot indefinitely invest our people's lives or our treasure in keeping the conflict in Afghanistan going. But I think the plan that the government has outlined, with the support of the opposition, and with the bipartisan view of most sensible people in this country, is that we ought to give it our best shot. Australia is making a very valuable contribution in Oruzgan province. Our people serving there are doing great credit to this country, and I think that most Australians expect us as politicians to do what the famous Edmund Burke said: not just reflect what public opinion says but we owe the public our judgment. And my judgment is that the policies of this government, supported by the other side, are right in Afghanistan. (*Time expired*)

**Mr BRIGGS** (Mayo) (5.42 pm)—I am very pleased to rise to speak on the motion to take note as well, and very pleased to follow the member for Melbourne Ports, for whom I have a deal of respect when it comes to these matters—although not everything he commented on in his contribution this afternoon.

I will begin by commending the parliament for the manner in which this debate has taken place in the past week. In the main I think it has shown how we can perform at our best and do what the Australian people expect us to do in this place. While I have not always agreed with the propositions outlined by some members, and the positions put by some members, I think we do those who serve us a great honour by debating this issue in our parliament. In that respect I acknowledge the Prime Minister's contribution, but in particular I acknowledge the contribution of the Leader of the Opposition, who outlined his position in a thoughtful and considered manner.

To debate our ongoing contribution to Afghanistan we need to return to the original purpose of the mission. It was of course a decision taken in the light of the burning wreck of the Twin Towers, the Pentagon and a blackened field in Pennsylvania. It was to some extent the defining event of our generation. I very well remember sitting at home watching the late news on channel 10 when Sandra Sully, in a somewhat unforgettable way, crossed to the unfolding events in New York in the United States of America. What came next will never leave me, and nor it should—that was the vision of the second plane hitting the second tower.

Australia at that time, under the leadership and the prime ministership of John Howard, took the right decision to immediately indicate to our closest ally that we would stand together. By dint of fortune our Prime Minister was in Washington on that day when these events were occurring around him. He said at a hastily prepared press conference on that day:

... on behalf of all of the Australians here is to say to our American friends, who we love and admire so much, we really feel for you. It is a terrible day. It is a day that recalls the words used by President Roosevelt in 1941—it is a day of infamy that an act of this kind can be made in such an indiscriminate fashion—not upon military assets as was the case in Pearl Harbor but upon innocent civilians; men, women and children going about their daily lives. As I say, words aren't very adequate but they are a sign that we feel for our American friends. We will stand by them, we will help them, and we will support actions they take to properly retaliate in relation to those acts of bastardry against their citizens and against what they stand for.

What the Prime Minister at that point would not have known was that there were Australians also in those towers who were caught up in the events on that disastrous day.

It is now a matter of history that in the days and weeks that followed the attacks on the United States it became very obvious that those responsible for planning the attacks were based in large part in Afghanistan. The United Nations sanctioned a force that proceeded to invade Afghanistan to rid that country of the masterminds of the attack on the United States, al-Qaeda. The United States rightly demanded that those who harboured Islamic extremist groups like al-Qaeda either turn them over or face the consequences of that action. Al-Qaeda, like other Islamic extremist organisations, exists to do us harm. As the member for Melbourne Ports so rightly outlined, they are not our friends.

A point often forgotten by some in this debate is that Islamic extremists do not attack us because of our friends and because of our alliances; they attack us because of our values. Again history tells us that the original mission, the original purpose of the UN sanctioned force, was difficult but it succeeded in a remarkably short amount of time. The Taliban was quickly overthrown and al-Qaeda's operational homeland was effectively removed. While this disrupted the substantial terror network, our people unfortunately have still been subjected to the violence and terror practised by these Islamic extremists. We should never forget what happened to Australians in Bali on two occasions and to our embassy in Indonesia and, as the member for Melbourne Ports outlined, to those who suffered in India recently in Mumbai. This is why we fight in this ongoing war on terror.

That brings me to today and the reasons for our ongoing commitment to Afghanistan. The member for Melbourne Ports said, and he is right, that the opposition and the government have a bipartisan commitment, and so we should. The Australian public, and importantly those we ask to serve on our behalf, should be fully informed of what our mission is, especially after nine years of this conflict. I have to say the best description I have read on our mission and its purpose in recent times was from Major General John Cantwell in an interview conducted by Paul Toohey on 13 October 2010 and reprinted on the Punch website. Major General Cantwell says, 'Our mission is very clear: train the Afghans to manage security around the key population areas of Oruzgan.' The major-general in this very same interview makes the very valid point that the mission has not been well enough explained by either military or political leaders in recent times and therefore we are, as the Leader of the Opposition identified so rightly in his contribution, at real risk of losing the PR war at the very same time as we are making significant steps to winning the real war. This in my view is a significant failure and it does not honour the sacrifice of the 21 brave men who have died in this commitment. If nothing else, this debate should ensure that we do not put these commitments to the recesses of our minds forever and that we constantly reflect on the troops we have com-

mitted, the reasons that they are there and what we can do to ensure that they can achieve their mission.

Given this history and given the need for us to ensure that Afghanistan is never again used to harbour and train Islamic extremists, the original purpose of the mission, who seek to do us harm and do our friends harm, what is our plan? I believe we have four distinct options to move forward. The first is a complete and immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan, as suggested by some in this debate and some outside this place. I believe this would be a historic mistake. It would give strength to those that we battle. It would strengthen the arm of the Islamic extremists who we continue to fight alongside those with whom we share values. It would be a mistake of historic proportions. Option 2 is for an unending commitment, taking away effective control of Afghanistan from the people of Afghanistan and for us to manage their country. Option 3 is to continue with the status quo.

Option 4, the final one we are left with and I think the most considered option, is to work harder, quicker and more effectively to ensure that we have a sustainable Afghanistan which can protect itself, and ensure that it is never returned to a safe haven for Islamic extremists like al-Qaeda and for the Taliban. I believe our alliance with the United States is the most important alliance that we have. The United States of America is a force for good in the world and it continues to be today, even though it has significant pressures domestically and internationally. It is in our absolute national interest that our alliance with the United States remains strong and that the US remains a force in our region in the coming decades.

To those who suggest, and they have in this debate, that to respect the American alliance is to slavishly follow the Americans' foreign interest ahead of our own, to suggest that we do not have our own independent foreign policy or our own independent foreign thought, I say that I fundamentally disagree with that assessment. Our national interest drives our foreign policy interest. It always has and it always should. It is in our national interest to stand with our like-minded allies, to stand with those who share our values. The United States is foremost amongst those. That is why we should, together with our coalition allies, increase the pressure on the Afghanistan government to take more responsibility for their own future. They have, as the member for Melbourne Ports identified, thus far been subjected to a great deal of bribery. They have hardly been what you would describe as a model of effective government or one that we can place a great deal of confidence in. However, that must change, and I think the President of the United States, in the recently released book by Bob Woodward, identifies the necessary improvement that needs to occur in Kabul if it is to be possible for us to achieve what we set out to achieve in the first place, which we must remember was to ensure that Afghanistan never becomes a safe haven for those Islamic extremists who have done us so much harm.

As the Leader of the Opposition said, so correctly, in his contribution to the parliament:

Our objective is to allow Afghans to choose what they think is right for them. The Taliban's objective is to impose what it regards as the one right system. We are prepared to accept choices by the Afghan people that we don't like. Our key stipulation is merely that Afghanistan should never again become a base for international terrorism.

This is absolutely correct. As flawed as this government in Kabul may be, it is our last best hope.

Our job in Afghanistan is not to defeat the Taliban in the field of conflict. People have rightly pointed out in recent days that that is a mission that is too hard to achieve. Our job is the security of Afghans and to ensure that they are trained to look after themselves. In recent weeks, leading into this debate, there has been comment made by the editor of the *Spectator* magazine, Mr Tom Switzer, who suggested last week that we should withdraw. There has been comment made by Mr Greg Sheridan of the *Weekend Australian*, someone I have a great deal of respect for, that we need to reconsider our objectives in Afghanistan and we need to be looking at the ways that we can more quickly move our forces from that area.

As much as I despise what the Taliban stand for, I accept that political moves are now as important as military moves in trying to end the violence. It is a logical and necessary step forward. There has been much commentary and comment on my predecessor's article in the *Spectator* magazine a week ago, where he laid out the reasons these political discussions should occur. In fact, the member for Melbourne Ports also made some comments in his contribution about them. But I do suspect that not everybody had read the full article before making comment on what Alexander Downer was suggesting. Far from suggesting that our forces cut and run, he was suggesting that we ensure that our strategy works to ensure that the original purpose of the mission is successful. His argument is best summed up in this paragraph:

Put simply, the initial military aims in Afghanistan have been achieved. Now is the time for diplomacy and political negotiations. President Karzai has a strong hand. He has the support of the US and its allies and there will be no military withdrawal until the Taliban is prepared to settle for a political solution.

The 21 fine Australians who gave their lives in this conflict should never be forgotten. Lest we forget. I believe we would be dishonouring them by abandoning our mission now. But we would also dishonour them if we continued to accept the status quo.

Many contributors in this place have honoured our troops, their skills, their loyalty and their commitment, and I join with all of those who have done so. I stand by our troops and I support their mission. I undertake to them that I will continue to keep their commitment at the front of my mind and ensure that they are not committed a moment longer than necessary. Our commitment is important and our goals in Afghanistan are important. Our fight against Islamic extremism remains our greatest security challenge and our greatest security threat. Australia must continue to stand with our like minded friends to ensure we win this fight. September 11, Bali and all those who have died around the world at the hands of these fanatics demand we do so.

**Mr GIBBONS** (Bendigo) (5.56 pm)—I have no doubt that all members speaking in this first debate on our military deployment in Afghanistan will pay tribute to the Australian men and women who are currently serving their country and I join my fellow parliamentarians in expressing the nation's gratitude to those who put their lives at risk on a daily basis, and especially those who already have paid, or may pay in the future, with their lives on active service. I extend deepest condolences on behalf of the people of central Victoria to the family and friends of those who have already fallen.

It is appropriate that we express our gratitude because as a nation we have not always done so in the past. The disgraceful treatment of our returning servicemen and women during and following the war in Vietnam remains a stain on our country's history and must never be repeated.

Whether or not the political decision by the government of the day to go to war was a good one or a bad one, the men and women we put in harm's way have had no say in where they are sent or whether they go. They merely do their duty to their nation. As politicians we carry the ultimate responsibility for strategic decisions about war and we must resist the temptation to cross the boundary and start playing armchair generals, as some on the other side of this House have been doing in recent weeks. Making uninformed calls for additional equipment that is inappropriate and unsuited to the conditions in which our troops are deployed is both reckless and irresponsible. Being able to compete in a triathlon and firing off a few rounds of ammunition on a visit to Oruzgan does not make you a military commander. It is not this parliament's role to second-guess tactical military decisions. This debate must concentrate on the strategic and political issues.

The fact that this debate is taking place nine years after the first deployment of Australian troops in Afghanistan means we must focus on dealing with the strategic realities that we face today. We cannot go back and change the past. We cannot go back and change the reasons why we became involved in Afghanistan in the first place. The fact is that we are there. We have troops and civilian personnel on the ground today and any decisions that are made about our future involvement must be based on the situation today and that expected to prevail in the future.

Having said that, it is useful to review what has transpired since 2001. Perhaps the first point to make is that there have been two quite different stages to our involvement in Afghanistan. Australia's commitment began in October 2001 after the al-Qaeda terrorist attacks on New York and Washington killed more than 3,000 people, including 10 Australians. Australian special forces joined American, British and other international troops in an intensive campaign against al-Qaeda and those who gave them sanctuary, including the Taliban. By December 2002 the Taliban had fallen and many al-Qaeda operatives had been killed whilst the remainder had fled across the border to Pakistan and our special forces troops had returned home.

In December 2001, Australia also made a commitment to the International Security Assistance Force, ISAF, whose United Nations mandate to provide security around Kabul was subsequently extended to cover the entire country. But, unfortunately, this promising start was followed by the distraction of Iraq. The reckless determination of the Bush and Blair administrations, aided and abetted by the former Howard government, to pursue Saddam Hussein's nonexistent weapons of mass destruction meant operations in Afghanistan were all but ignored and many of the hard won gains on the ground were thrown away. In the context of the campaign against al-Qaeda, the invasion of Iraq must be seen as a strategic blunder, as well as being of doubtful legality. It is something that the Australian Labor Party voted against in this parliament at the time.

By September 2005, the rising insurgency forced members of ISAF to refocus on Afghanistan and Australian special forces were deployed again. ISAF continues to operate under a United Nations mandate, which was renewed earlier this month for a further year. Its strategic objectives are to establish security across the country and then transfer responsibility for security and governance to the Afghan authorities, which will permit a phased withdrawal of the international troops. Since August 2003, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, NATO, has assumed responsibility for the leadership of ISAF and Australia now has some 1,550 military

personnel in Afghanistan both as part of ISAF and in the special operations task group. This is the largest contribution from any non-NATO member of ISAF. We also have a sizeable civilian presence, including AusAID officials, diplomats and members of the Australian Federal Police.

International terrorist attacks did not begin and end on 11 September 2001. Since then, some 100 Australians have been killed in attacks overseas, including 88 Australians in the Bali bombing of 2002 and four in the second Bali bombing in 2005. Our embassy in Jakarta was bombed in 2004. In each of these cases, the terrorist groups involved had links to Afghanistan. Although no longer the safe haven that it once was, if the current insurgency in Afghanistan were to succeed and the international community were to withdraw, then Afghanistan could once again become a base for terrorists. Al-Qaeda's ability to recruit and indoctrinate, train, plan, finance and conspire to kill would be far greater than it is today. The propaganda victory for terrorists worldwide would be enormous.

It is in Australia's national interest that safe havens for terrorists, particularly those in South Asia and the Pacific, are kept to a minimum and their operations disrupted as much as possible. The strategic objective for Australia is clear: to deny terrorist networks a safe haven in Afghanistan. That is why Australia is participating in ISAF with many longstanding friends and allies, including the United States, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Canada, France, Singapore and Korea. The last two are among the Asian countries participating. There are also several Muslim countries involved, including Turkey, Jordan and Malaysia.

Australia's specific contributions to ISAF include training and mentoring the Afghan National Army's 4th Brigade to assume responsibility for security in Oruzgan province, building the capacity of the Afghan National Police to perform civil policing and helping improve the Afghan government's capacity to deliver core public services and create more income-earning opportunities for its people. As well as supporting this transitional program in Oruzgan, our special forces are still targeting the insurgent network in and around the province, disrupting insurgent operations and supply routes. This is dangerous work for our soldiers and we must expect there to be further casualties and loss of life among our troops.

The government is committed to providing the best protection and support for our soldiers and civilians in Afghanistan. Over the past 12 months, more than \$1.2 billion in funding has been announced for additional force protection measures for Australian personnel, including upgraded body armour and rocket, artillery and mortar protection. I am pleased to note that manufacturers in my electorate are at the forefront of protecting our service men and women. The Bendigo built Thales Bushmaster has time and time again demonstrated its unrivalled capability to protect our troops from gunfire, bombs and improvised explosive devices that would have otherwise resulted in fatalities. Australian Defence Apparel is a world-leading producer of body armour and also supplies more basic items such as combat uniforms. I am extremely proud that Bendigo's defence manufacturing sector is totally geared to produce vehicles and equipment designed to save lives and not destroy lives—somewhat of a unique situation in Australia today.

I regret that I have to inform the House that this proud record of protecting our troops overseas is now at some risk. I learnt earlier today that Thales Australia, the manufacturer of the Bushmaster in Bendigo, has announced redundancies at its Bendigo plant, largely due to lack of immediate further orders for its world-leading technology from our own Department of

Defence. Innovation is the engine that grows our economy and it would be a national tragedy if this country's knowledge and expertise in protected mobility design and manufacture were lost due to the bureaucratic maze that our Department of Defence operates in. I am quite sure that the governments of Britain and the United States would not let this happen to its defence manufacturers and neither should we. I will have more to say about this matter later when I have more details.

Returning to Afghanistan, we need to be clear that the task we have taken on in that country is not nation building. We are there to support the Afghan people's transition to a stable government—one that is able to maintain its own national security and protect its own population. I do, however, believe that the UN, including Australia, has been too ambitious, as it was in Iraq. We must accept that we have made promises about democracy, the rule of law and human rights for women and minorities which cannot realistically be delivered in a handful of years to a country without any democratic tradition. Success for the UN and ISAF will therefore have to mean achieving an intermediate state of affairs in Afghanistan that is somewhere between ideal and intolerable.

It may be that the idea of a centralised Afghan democracy is too radical for a country in which central administration has never worked in the past. There are a range of outcomes that the Afghan government and ISAF might find acceptable that are achievable. None of these outcomes are perfect and all would require sacrifice. But a compromise that would allow ISAF to withdraw its troops may have to involve a more inclusive, flexible and decentralised political settlement, perhaps in conjunction with the Taliban in some areas of the country. This should be acceptable to Australia also. After all, we count among our friends many nations that are not democracies. We can surely accommodate another one.

To achieve even a limited strategic objective will require ISAF to remain engaged in Afghanistan beyond 2014. Australia should remain part of the coalition. There will still be a need for Australians to conduct training and other defence cooperation activities. The civilian led aid and development effort should also continue. We have heard from the Prime Minister that these support, training and development tasks may continue in some form through to the end of this decade at least. In light of this, while my heart may be saying that we should bring our troops home now, my head supports the Prime Minister's view that we have to stay.

This is the decision I have come to after careful consideration of the available information and not, as the member for Denison suggested in his speech last week, because I have sacrificed my soul for my party's political self-interest—an accusation I strongly resent. I believe I am representing the views of most in my electorate in light of the two beautiful young women from Bendigo whose lives were so tragically cut short while they were doing nothing but enjoying a holiday in Bali. So I say to the member for Denison: do not come into this House and lecture people about conscience or principle, because I and many others on this side of the House are acting precisely according to our consciences in supporting our nation's involvement in Afghanistan.

In summary, Afghanistan is a completely different situation to Iraq. Afghanistan has always been a war of self-defence, launched after al-Qaeda's strikes on September 11, rather than a pre-emptive strike which turned out to be without foundation. It was initiated pursuant to international law under the United Nations Security Council's mandate and it continues to be supported by key leaders in the international community. Australia has a proud history of sup-

porting the aims and objectives of the United Nations. A unilateral withdrawal from Afghanistan would raise questions about our commitment to the UN and to the rule of international law.

While we value the Australia-United States alliance—and I recognise its importance to our national security—I would much rather see the US acting multilaterally under a UN mandate than charging around the world as a lone maverick engaged in its own foreign policy adventures. This is exactly what is happening in Afghanistan, and if we turn our backs on that now, at a time when the US President is trying to steer his country away from ill-advised, unilateral military interventions, we will be playing into the hands of those American hawks who argue that it is always better for the US to act on its own, even in defiance of the United Nations.

Finally, we must not forget that we have moral obligations to Afghans. We should not bolt for the exit because the going gets tougher. We should make sure that when we leave we have discharged our responsibilities to the international community, to our allies and, most importantly, to the people of Afghanistan. In conclusion, I believe that it is in Australia's national interest to remain part of the United Nations international commitment in Afghanistan.

**Mr MORRISON** (Cook) (6.09 pm)—On 19 March 2009 Sergeant Brett Till was killed in Afghanistan. He left behind Bree, his wife, and his two children, Jacob and Taleah. This weekend, on Saturday, we will celebrate the first birthday of Bree and Brett's only child. Bree contacted me when these speeches debating this matter began. She said—and it is worth repeating for the House:

I appreciate the respect for the fallen, but we stay because we need to stay—not for spite or pride. Risking more loss of life does not make lost lives less painful.

That was the advice of the widow of a soldier fallen in Afghanistan to this House about how we should think about these matters. We need to stay in Afghanistan not to justify the lives lost—we honour those lives and the fact that they were lost—but to complete the task that those who lost their lives made the ultimate sacrifice to complete. This task remains as valid today as it did when the Special Forces Task Force was deployed nine years ago, in October 2001. In this debate we have the opportunity to reaffirm why we need to stay.

Ten years after making his case for international intervention not just in Kosovo but more broadly, as a new doctrine, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair returned to Chicago to reaffirm his case in his post-politics world. He made a plea for patience with this doctrine, and I make a similar plea today in relation to our engagement in Afghanistan. Mr Blair said:

I understand completely the fatigue with an interventionist foreign policy—especially when it involves military action that takes its toll on a nation's psyche, when we see those who grieve for the fallen in battle. The struggle seems so vast, so complex, so full of layers and intersections that daunt us, that they make us unsure where we start, how we proceed and where and how on earth we end.

As we contemplate our continuing involvement, let us remind ourselves of what Mr Blair had said 10 years before:

Globalisation ... is not just economic, it's also a political and security phenomenon. ... We live in a world where isolationism has ceased to have a reason to exist. We cannot turn our backs on conflicts and the violation of human rights within other countries if we still want to be secure.

He said:

Where we are called upon to fight we have to do it. If we are defeated anywhere, we are at risk of being defeated everywhere.

As Tony Blair more recently argued:

... the struggle in which we are joined today is profound in its danger; requires engagement of a different and more comprehensive kind; and can only be won in the long haul. ... We live in an era of interdependence: the idea that if we let a problem fester it will be contained within its boundaries no longer applies ... Their problems will become ours.

We are engaged with our allies in this struggle. We are in Afghanistan to provide stability to a nation in crisis that has endured generations of upheaval and most recently has been brutalised by an oppressive and invasive Taliban regime that harboured al-Qaeda and ignored the fundamental human rights of their own people. We are in Afghanistan to deny a haven to terrorists who spend every waking hour devising and implementing their wicked plans and schemes to destroy everything we hold true as Australians. We are in Afghanistan to enable the nation of Afghanistan to once again govern itself and take charge of its own future, where its own citizens can assure each other of the freedoms we too often take for granted.

These are noble goals; these are worthy goals; these are our goals. They have not become any less important with the difficulty of this task or its duration or because of any frustration we may feel in achieving it. Do these goals represent an achievable purpose? We have no choice. If they are unachievable, we must make them achievable. As Blair also said:

This struggle we face now cannot be defeated by staying out, but by sticking in, abiding by our values, not retreating from them.

We are not responsible for terrorism. It cannot be justified on any grounds. We should be unapologetic in combating it.

But how do we defeat it here in Afghanistan? At a practical level we must understand that we are fundamentally in a battle for governance. In this battle our primary enemy is corruption. The need to increasingly address our attention to civil reforms has been highlighted by numerous experts, including our own Dr David Kilcullen and Peter Leahy from the National Security Institute. US General Petraeus has given positive signals to address greater effort in these areas also since taking up the command.

This is not an argument for greater use of soft versus hard power. To the contrary: the two can and must co-exist in our efforts in Afghanistan, and we must remain equal and true to both. We cannot hope to secure the civil reforms necessary to achieve working governance in Afghanistan without establishing a more secure environment. There are others in this place, and certainly outside, who can better advise how these security objectives can be operationally won, and I will leave it to them. But success will ultimately turn on the reforms to governance that so far frustrate our progress.

Dr Kilcullen argues that the Taliban are outgoverning the Afghani government: 'They are the ones collecting taxation, running small businesses, having agricultural policies, issuing title deeds and ID cards, even issuing passports in parts of the country.' Whit Mason, from the University of New South Wales Centre for Interdisciplinary Studies of Law, argued:

Most Afghans crave little more than peace and security from any predator, whether they be criminals, insurgents or corrupt police and officials.

He talked about the modicum of rough justice and security provided by the Taliban and the territories they control. The state, by contrast, he argues, 'cannot protect civilians against either the Taliban or common criminals. Police often extort money and the judiciary is seen as the most corrupt institution in the country.' Make no mistake: corruption is the resident evil that denies human beings worldwide their chance of a better life, whether it is the dictator regimes of Africa, the juntas of Burma or the corrupt bureaucracies of Afghanistan.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported in January that Afghans paid out \$2½ billion—almost one quarter of their GDP—in bribes in the previous 12 months. One in two Afghans had to pay at least one kickback to a public official in the previous year. Transparency International has rated Afghanistan, after Somalia, the second most corrupt country in the world. When I recently met with Afghan asylum seekers in the Curtin detention centre, they told me they had lost confidence in the Karzai government. It is no wonder when initiatives, such as the High Office of Oversight, established by the Karzai government to tackle corruption, was found by the US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction to suffer from significant gaps, was critically understaffed, lacking in basic skills and experience, and the organisational, external and personal independence required by international standards were not present. The challenge of confronting such corruption is that it becomes cultural and intergenerational. It becomes hard-wired into the DNA of a nation. It is not long before children have to bribe their teachers or be sent from home school, as we know happens in many developing countries in Africa today,

As the UNODC report recommends, Afghanistan does need an independent, fearless and well-funded anticorruption authority. The appointment of governors and district leaders must include a negative corruption pledge. People holding public service positions should disclose their incomes and assets. Administrative procedures must be made more user-friendly and public services made more accessible and service orientated. Full transparency must exist in public procurement, tendering practices and political campaigns. Serious attention needs to be given to salary levels and structures for public officials. Proceeds of crime must be confiscated. Prosecution of corrupt officials must proceed. The chief justice must discipline their judiciary. It cannot be, as the report says, 'Cheaper to buy a judge than hire a lawyer.'

Despite setbacks, there are examples of progress in these areas and they are listed in the numerous reports put together. It is pleasing to note that Australian forces and civilians are actively engaged in addressing these issues in Afghanistan and Oruzgan province. These include our Federal Police, aid workers, civilian contractors and of course our ADF force element, incorporating Army Chief Engineer Works personnel and combat teams for organic force protection.

It is worth noting that, during the past four years, as security steadily improved the number of NGOs deployed in Oruzgan assisting the local population grew from just six to 50. That means better health care, education, commerce and infrastructure. More broadly, the report to congress *Progress Toward Security and Stability in Afghanistan*, in April 2010, found very pleasing developments: two-thirds of the districts of Afghanistan can offer Afghan citizens access to basic health care; a polio immunisation campaign is underway; 648 midwives have graduated from supported programs, representing a quarter of all midwives in the country. Also, the total number of trained midwives in Afghanistan has reached 2,500, compared to just 475 under Taliban rule. Prenatal care visits are up 17 per cent and the number of women

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using school birth attendance is up 40 per cent. Currently, approximately two-thirds of school-age children are attending primary school in Afghanistan. Nearly seven million students are enrolled in primary and secondary schools and 37 per cent are female. Under the Taliban, only 900,000 students were enrolled in primary and secondary schooling—all boys, no girls.

University enrolment in Afghanistan has grown to 62,000, compared to only 7,881 under the Taliban. Between 2002 and 2010, more than 75.6 million textbooks have been printed in Dari and Pashto, for grades 1 to 12, in subject areas such as language, maths, biology and geography. Finally, more than 680 schools have been built or refurbished. That is worth being in Afghanistan for; that is why we are there. These are the goals which we seek. There is of course much more to be done. These measures should form the primary benchmarks by which our success in Afghanistan is measured.

Particular challenges we should be mindful of are the fact that around 60 per cent of the Afghani population is under the age of 25. These are a key recruitment pool for insurgent groups. The opportunities for those young people in Afghanistan in the future will be overlooked at our great peril. The focus of these efforts must be very much geared to those individuals.

The equity of aid distribution must also deal with the spectrum of need across the nation and not marginalise those areas of the country that are presently the focus of military engagement. The Lowy Institute was told in June this year of a story of one group interviewed in Afghanistan, which said:

“we didn’t grow poppy, we supported the Government and we embraced non-violent means to raise our concerns, but the Government of Afghanistan and the international community focuses only in the insurgent-afflicted areas. We feel we don’t matter to the government or the international community because we didn’t pick up guns and fight”

This is an important warning to us in our activities and programs in Afghanistan in how we dispense, distribute and support this country in getting to its feet and creating a future for itself. Of course, our own troops are intensely engaged in the training of the 4th Brigade of the Afghan National Army’s 209th Atal—which means ‘hero’—Corps in defending their own country. We have around 700 soldiers in the first mentoring task force who are currently committed to this operation. Creating the opportunity for this country to take hold of its own future is an exciting and worthy goal. This is a fundamental point. It is about building capacity for self-governance. To achieve this will require the Afghani people to develop a thirst and confidence in their own future.

When I meet Afghan asylum seekers in our detention centres and I see individuals who have given up on their country, it is a sad thing. We do not judge them in making that decision, and the fact that they have taken the decisions they have is evidence of the greater effort we need to make to give Afghans a greater sense of confidence in the future of their nation, as our grandfathers and fathers did when they took up arms and ensured the security of our nation in the conflicts where Australia was directly under threat.

In addition to training and reforming the governance of Afghanistan, made possible by security delivered by our defence forces, Afghanistan must also address the difficult issue of reconciliation. Whether it is in Rwanda, South Africa or Afghanistan there can be no reconciliation without truth or justice. Simple amnesties will not suffice. The truth must be told,

wrongs acknowledged, injustices condemned and victims and families heard to heal the wounds. These wounds, of course, include and go well beyond the recent Taliban rule.

It is important that we find the sort of depth of leadership that was provided by Archbishop Desmond Tutu in pursuing the Truth and Reconciliation Commission process in South Africa, which has been such a healing process for that country. A similar process was put in place in Rwanda post the genocides. If South Africa can do it and, in particular, if Rwanda can do it—where almost a million people were macheted to death in the space of around 100 days—then Afghanistan can indeed do it. Our troops, our civilians, our forces, our fellow Australians and our allies are engaged in this great battle and we cannot shirk from it.

**Mr PERRETT** (Moreton) (6.23 pm)—I rise to add my voice to the many speakers who have spoken about the conflict in Afghanistan. I do not do so to explore the wrongs and the rights or the ifs and buts of our Australian presence. I have never been a huge fan of the ‘coulda, shoulda, wouldas’. I will leave such esoteric explorations to other speakers.

For the record, and for those keeping score, I fully support our presence and involvement. I honour all of our military personnel and others like the AFP who have made and continue to make a very worthwhile contribution over there. However, I do wish to particularly acknowledge two groups. Firstly, I acknowledge the ADF personnel who have made the supreme sacrifice in the service of their nation during Operation Slipper. As I say their names, I pray for them and their families: Sergeant Andrew Russell, Trooper David Pearce, Sergeant Matthew Locke, Private Luke Worsley, Lance Corporal Jason Marks, Signaller Sean McCarthy, Lieutenant Michael Fussell, Private Gregory Sher, Corporal Matthew Hopkins, Sergeant Brett Till, Private Benjamin Renaudo, Sapper Jacob Moerland, Sapper Darren Smith, Private Timothy Aplin, Private Benjamin Chuck, Private Scott Palmer, Private Nathan Bewes, Trooper Jason Brown, Private Tomas Dale, Private Grant Kirby and Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney. That is a long list—way too long.

The second group I particularly wish to acknowledge is all the ADF personnel from the Royal Australian Air Force. Many previous speakers, including the members for Eden-Monaro and Fadden, spoke eloquently and passionately on behalf of all ADF personnel, and with good reason. But, with complete respect to them, I suggest that they sometimes see such contributions through green eyes. I just want to put my particular blue bias on the record. The RAAF continues to do great work in all areas of Operation Slipper, and I look forward to them continuing their proud traditions.

I believe unshakably in the separation of powers. Western democracies are served well by this convention. Consequently, I believe that it is the purview of the executive, not the parliament, to involve the ADF in military operations. There were many reasons for the Howard government to make this decision earlier this century. It is not that the executive cannot be informed by parliamentary debates, but I just wanted to make it clear that I believe it is the executive’s decision.

There is an argument for suggesting that the Afghanistan intervention was warranted merely because while the Taliban was in power in Afghanistan many were treated very poorly—particularly women. Some Taliban believed that women were not allowed to work or to be educated after the age of eight, and up until the age of eight they were only permitted to study the Koran. In some parts of Afghanistan women were not even allowed to be treated by

male doctors unless they were accompanied by a male chaperone. People who transgressed, even innocently, faced public flogging and, in too many cases, execution.

It is easy to find documented references to women having a thumb cut off just for wearing nail varnish. In 1999 a mother of seven was executed in a televised display in front of 30,000 spectators in Kabul's Ghazi Sport Stadium for allegedly murdering her abusive husband. She was also tortured for three years beforehand. There are many cases like this that I could go through.

Human Rights Watch and other international observers, such as Amnesty International, have lots of similar reports of such treatment. In many areas under Taliban control women were subjected to threats, intimidation and violence. Girls' education was particularly targeted. Women political leaders and activists were attacked and killed with impunity. For example, a female government employee quit her job after receiving a threatening letter—what they call a night letter—in February 2010. This was not before the Taliban were deposed but in February 2010—intimidation still goes on. The night letter said:

We as Taliban warn you to stop working ... otherwise we will take your life away. We will kill you in such a harsh way that no woman has so far been killed in that manner. This would become a good lesson for women like you who are working.

This was for doing something as radical as being employed. Another example given is of a 22-year-old working for an American development company who received similar threats by phone but continued to work. In April this year unidentified gunmen shot her dead as she left her office.

The Taliban also imposed the death penalty for homosexuality. Unfortunately, under the regime change there has not been a significant improvement in the lot of gays, lesbians and bisexuals in Afghanistan. Thankfully, it is a slightly better story for women. Education is improving and there do not appear to be as many hangings of women for infringing sharia law. Certainly, Minister O'Connor talked to me about the so-called 'women's hill' in Kabul, where the Taliban used to round up women and hang them as a display, particularly if they did something as bad as being involved in education. But it has not been anywhere near as gruesome of late.

Obviously there are still many troubles and challenges ahead for Afghanistan, but the rule of law is starting to assert itself. I give as an example the courage that is being shown by people in Tarin Kowt. Minister O'Connor mentioned a woman who is currently serving as an officer in the Afghan National Police—and the police there are targeted even more than the Afghan military. Her role there had previously been taken by two other female officers. The first woman to occupy the role had been killed. She was not killed as part of her general policing duties, but deliberately targeted and killed—and killed horribly—by those who did not wish to see an Afghan woman in the workforce, let alone as a serving police officer. This first poor woman was replaced by another female police officer, who then was also threatened and subsequently killed. Minister O'Connor talked about the fact that the third brave woman stood up to take on the role, even though she has also been threatened with death and knows of the dangers that remain. Such courage takes my breath away.

Obviously justice in Afghanistan is a very important prerequisite for progress. To again quote Minister O'Connor:

Without security there can be no flourishing of a civil society. Without freedom of movement there can be no economic development, no access to services, no opportunity to be transformed by education. Without stability, people are denied their fundamental right to participate in social, economic and political life.

Therefore, Australia as a nation based on the rule of law needs to set a good example at every opportunity during our engagement in Afghanistan. Thankfully, this is very easy for our very professional ADF personnel and groups such as the Australian Federal Police, other Australian public servants and even our Australian NGOs—and there are many of them that are involved in Afghanistan.

Whilst the people we send over there are very professional, unfortunately the same cannot be said for all who comment here on their involvement in Afghanistan. I have received a couple of phone calls on this particular topic, and I have made a point of talking to these concerned people. They were mostly returned service personnel. Many phoned up, asking, ‘Why aren’t you intervening in this matter?’ while referring to the three soldiers who have been charged. I then went through my point of view and most people came around to accepting it. I will read from an email from one of my constituents. He says that he is a member of the local RSL and says:

I want to express some views regarding the members of the ADF who are facing charges regarding the deaths of innocent victims in Afghanistan—

I will not say the gentleman’s name, and I am reading selectively from his email—

The government and opposition need to remain at arm’s length from any investigation unless the investigation is deemed flawed.

This is a gentleman who has spent quite a few years in the military. He goes on:

While military personnel do operate under extreme conditions and often in life and death situations, there need to be rules not just to seek to prevent avoidable deaths, particularly among non-combatants, but also to protect the professionalism of the ADF. I will go further and say that irresponsible comments for political gain also have the very prospect of further endangering the lives of our troops from the Taliban, who will use the publicity that some seek from this issue to gain greater support for their murderous cause.

That is just one of the emails I received about this issue. Whilst there is a bit of hysteria out there, it is good to see that there are some common sense approaches, particularly from people who have served overseas.

I intend to make a few points broadly about military justice and then touch on the commentary that followed when the Director of Military Prosecutions announced the charges on 27 September. The primary aim of the law of armed conflict, also known as international humanitarian law, is to protect the victims of armed conflict and to regulate the conduct of hostilities based on a balance between military necessity and humanity. At the heart of the law of armed conflict lies the principle of distinction between the armed forces, who conduct the hostilities on behalf of the parties to an armed conflict, and civilians, who are presumed not to directly participate in hostilities and must be protected against the dangers arising from military operations. Under these international humanitarian laws, the concept of direct participation in hostilities, which refers to conduct which is carried out by civilians, suspends their protection against the dangers arising from military operations. Most notably, for the duration

of their direct participation in hostilities civilians may be directly attacked as if they were combatants in those particular circumstances.

Throughout history, humankind has, unfortunately, continually resorted to force to resolve our conflicts, even though there has not been as much conflict in the last 20 or 30 years as in the 40 years before. International law developed within the limitations of the use of force in an attempt to minimise the horror, particularly in response to the conflict of World War II. The doctrine of proportionality requires a response of force to be proportional to the aggression that precipitated such force. This doctrine accepts wartime civilian casualties as unfortunately inevitable, but the doctrine of proportionality requires that civilian casualties inflicted by military strikes not be excessive in relation to the anticipated military advantage gained by the strike. The rules of engagement are specific to the conditions of a particular area of operations, and the actual text of any set of rules of engagement is classified and therefore not publicly available. Obviously you do not want the force you are up against to know what you can and cannot do, so they are always classified.

Consequently, I was quite surprised recently to see the commentary about the rules of engagement in Afghanistan. I was not aware that Alan Jones was privy to the rules of engagement for Afghanistan. Thankfully, in Brisbane we do not have Alan Jones, but we do have some of his radio acolytes—'acolytes' being spelt 'aco-lights'—and they have also acted as if they too are privy to the rules of engagement in Afghanistan. I consider that there will be much similar inflammatory comment in the lead-up to this debate, but we need to remember the following. The role of the independent Director of Military Prosecutions came about through recommendations arising from a series of committee inquiries in this particular building, many of which were gravely concerned that military justice was not delivering impartial, rigorous and fair outcomes to members of the ADF. To put it on the record, the Director of Military Prosecutions, Brigadier Lyn McDade, is a former deputy coroner from Darwin, a long-time barrister and a mother of two Defence Force personnel. She has served in the Army as a regular soldier and as a reservist since 1983—which, to put it in context, is back before the Wallabies were being coached to their grand slam victory by Alan Jones. She clearly has lots of military experience, and I look forward to her getting on with what must be a very difficult job.

Just to be clear, at the Senate estimates hearings Air Chief Marshal Houston said that the soldiers who are facing the charges are fully entitled to the presumption of innocence and that the Army has gone to unprecedented lengths and will spare no expense to support the soldiers and to make sure that they are properly treated in the system. Many of the people in my electorate have signed a petition calling for the charges to be dropped. As I said, I urge them to consider the implications of what they are advocating. They are urging my parliamentary involvement in an area that is totally unjustified, and I hope that these personal attacks on Brigadier McDade will stop, because they are disgraceful, especially from people who should know better. I refer particularly to an exchange between the Leader of the Opposition and Mr Alan Jones where the Leader of the Opposition said:

I'm not sure whether we can overturn the decision of an independent prosecutor ...

Simply: you should not even consider it. He then goes on to say:

Well, as I said, Alan, I suspect there has been a deep failure by this Government to provide these soldiers with the defence that they are entitled to.

That is rubbish. Then he also went on to say:

... because the last thing that people would want to see is soldiers being stabbed in the back by their own Government and I know a lot of people think that's what's happening.

That is completely erroneous and should not have been said. He then went on to say that he was 'the standard bearer for values and ideals which matter and which are important'. Standard bearer, if you look back, is a term used by the military when they used to put soldiers out front to carry the standard. We do not do it much anymore, but a standard bearer then was someone who was out in front of the force. They were often young boys and often in extreme danger. To be a standard bearer in society now, which is what Mr Abbott claims to be, is different—so I suggest that he go back on that radio show and apologise for what he said about this completely proper process.

I return to that female police officer that I talked about earlier—the one serving in the Afghan National Police in Tarin Kowt, the capital of Oruzgan province—and think about the amount of courage that this woman has shown. I hope that Mr Abbott, the Leader of the Opposition, shows similar courage in going back and apologising for the way he treated the prosecutor, Brigadier McDade.

**Mr IAN MACFARLANE** (Groom) (6.39 pm)—I welcome the opportunity to speak on this most significant of issues in this forum. As the grandson, son and nephew of men who have served for Australia in the AIF in the First and Second World Wars, I put on the record my support for the Afghanistan deployment. I would like to acknowledge all the speakers who have come before me in contributing to this debate for the deep thoughts and carefully considered arguments which they have offered up. In the shared bipartisan views as well as the divergent arguments that have been put forward in this place we have seen both a chief responsibility and one of the greatest features of our national parliament. The Afghanistan deployment is one of the most significant issues before our country, and it is right and fair that it should be discussed in this forum. The Australian deployment in Afghanistan is of national significance and also the deepest personal significance for the families of the 21 Australian soldiers who gave their lives for our democracy in Afghanistan and of the 156 men who have been injured as a result of this conflict.

In light of that sad and serious toll, it is important to discuss in depth our reasons for maintaining a military presence in Afghanistan. As we have heard, Australia's contribution of 2,350 personnel and equipment in the Middle East area of operations, of which 1,550 troops are in Afghanistan, is our most significant contribution since Vietnam. All Australians feel the responsibility and significance of Australia's deployment in Afghanistan. Coming from a region on the Darling Downs which is closely linked with the Australian Defence Force, that significance is felt more sharply and the responsibility is that bit heavier. The people of Toowoomba and the Darling Downs have a long history of firsthand experience with the ADF. We know what it is like for Defence to be a major employer and understand the contribution made by personnel to our national defence and our national character but also, most importantly, our international reputation.

While the Darling Downs is not instantly recognisable as the home of defence bases as are other cities such as Townsville, the ADF has been part of our community for decades—almost a century, in fact, through both Borneo Barracks at Cabarlah and the Oakey Army Aviation Centre. Like many regional and rural areas, the long-term allegiance to the ADF is also evi-

dent in local cenotaphs scattered across my electorate and in countless memorial halls and RSLs. It is also clear from the connections so many people in my region have to defence personnel, whether they are currently serving or provided the service in the past, as is the case with my family. Thus, for this region there is an added resonance to the debate about our future in Afghanistan, which is taking place in all communities across Australia. Nine years after Australian troops were first deployed in Afghanistan, it is fair for Australia to be asking what the purpose of our deployment is and whether it should continue. I believe the answer to the latter question is an obvious yes. Our deployment of troops should continue for the reasons we first entered into the war: to stand against terrorism and to stand with our ally the United States but also to reflect Australia's obligations as a mature democracy that accepts its international responsibilities.

As all Australians understand, our deployment in Afghanistan began in the gravest of circumstances, following the September 11 terrorist attacks in the United States in 2001. As someone who was in parliament at the time—in fact, in cabinet at the time—I can say that Australia readily embraced its responsibility both as a fierce opponent of any form of terrorism and as an ally of the United States, and sent a deployment to Afghanistan under the United Nations mandated International Security Assistance Force as part of the global fight against terrorism. While Australia's original deployment was an important part of international solidarity, it was about more than just being a good ally. The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 were anathema to Australia and to Australians. Afghanistan had long been a training ground for terrorists, including those who perpetuated the attacks in Bali and Jakarta and against our embassy in Indonesia. Over the past decade close to 100 Australians have been killed in terrorist attacks, including 15 Australians in the 2001 attack on the World Trade Center in the United States. Therefore, Australia's deployment to Afghanistan must be to dismantle a terrorist safe haven and has always been strongly guided by a will to protect Australia's national security interests.

In the nine years since the initial deployment, our chief objective has changed. However, it does not follow from this that our purpose for being in Afghanistan has diminished. While the objectives of the deployment have evolved, the deployment remains in Australia's national security interests, just as it was in 2001. Australia's role in Afghanistan is threefold: to deny refuge to terrorists, to stabilise Afghanistan and to honour our alliance obligations under the ANZUS treaty.

The coalition supports a strategy that in the first instance denies Afghanistan as a training ground and an operational base for al-Qaeda and other terrorist organisations. We also support the stabilisation of the Afghan state through a combination of civil, police and military training for local Afghans to enable them to achieve self-determination within a reasonable period of time. Australian troops are now training the 4th Afghan Brigade with a view to providing them with the skills to ultimately take full responsibility for the security of their own citizens. It is a task that is not only challenging but also worth the investment of time to do it properly. The 4th Brigade being capable of controlling Oruzgan is the key to enabling our troops to withdraw so that the Afghans can control their own destiny, a safe and secure place where people can live without fear of reprisals from the Taliban and other criminal elements. While this is an important task, it is also true that it is dangerous and progress can be elusive. Nonetheless, on evidence from the Department of Defence, progress is being made.

To leave abruptly or to impose an artificial deadline at which point Australia would withdraw both our troops and our support puts at risk compromising all the progress that has been made to date. The Australian deployment in Afghanistan is not stuck in a quagmire; it is not a deployment that persists for pride, hubris or a misplaced sense of loyalty. It is a deployment that shows Australia is true to its word and is serious about its responsibilities as a modern global democracy. If Australia is to fulfil its responsibilities in this sense, we cannot engage with other countries only if and when we choose.

In the past, our nation has shown that it believes in democracy with sufficient strength that we have fought to help ensure other nations can begin their own journeys towards their own democracies as the best way to preserve freedoms and basic human rights. I still believe that to be the case, but the path to democracy is not something we should impose from above and nor should we set strict rules about how other nations' democracies should look in practice. But if we are no longer prepared to defend the ideal of democracy as a political model worth aspiring to then we are failing in our duties as a mature and resilient democracy.

While it is true that the Australian contingent of 1,550 troops is small compared to our allies the United States and Britain, it is both an important symbol of our allegiance to the ideals and practices of democracy and an important purpose driven deployment that is achieving real objectives. It is easy to defend democracy from a country such as Australia where many of the most fiercely fought-for rights, such as the freedom of speech and the freedom of self-determination, are so ingrained that their day-to-day existence is no longer a marvel but is more like a taken-for-granted reality. Equally, some may say that it is easy to argue in favour of our soldiers' mission from this place rather than from the soil of Afghanistan.

In preparing for this debate I read the reports of progress in Afghanistan. One of the statistics that was truly remarkable was the percentage of female students now enrolled in schools there. From around one million students attending school in 2001, none of whom were girls, today there are more than six million children at school, one-third of whom are girls. Other reports indicate an increase in the availability of basic health services and the development of community based infrastructure projects. When I look at such reports I cannot be swayed by any argument that the work of Australia's deployment in Afghanistan is futile.

Australia made a commitment to help secure the future for Afghan citizens and to work to prevent their nation from becoming a future breeding ground of terrorists. It is true that progress to date has not been perfect. The Karzai government has work to do before the nation is free from the influence of corruption, but I believe it is wrong to view Afghanistan as an occupied country. Rather, it is a fragile political environment in which everyday people are increasingly taking both responsibility and control. I also acknowledge that we cannot eliminate terrorism from all parts of the region, let alone the world, but through our deployment Australia can help, and is helping, to ensure stability to prevent Afghanistan from falling back into the clutches of terrorism. This is important not only for the country itself but also for the region.

Ultimately, our success in this objective and the fate of the region will depend upon the people of Afghanistan. One day Afghanistan will and must be responsible for its own security and for its own destiny, but if we walk away now we risk condemning the people of Afghanistan to failure before the first benefits of success can be appreciated and, worse still, signpost

a message that democracy is only for some and at some point worth giving up on. I cannot and will not subscribe to this view.

While this debate has been ongoing in the formal environment of this place, I am mindful that the real work is being completed in Afghanistan where the troops who accepted the consequence of our parliamentary debate are going about their work with pride and with purpose. Australia is playing a significant role training and promoting the development of the Afghan people in determining their destiny. This is not a task to be taken lightly and its significance should never be underestimated. To fight for the liberties of the people of Afghanistan freed from the influence of terrorism is to uphold the spirit of the reason that Australians were deployed to Afghanistan in the first place.

To expect a simple realisation of this objective would be at best naive and at worst deliberately turning our back on the task that we set out to achieve. Australia has made a commitment to the international forces that are rebuilding Afghanistan and has made a commitment to the people of Afghanistan. As a nation we have borne the most serious and sad consequences of our deployment in Afghanistan, but our resolve must remain unshaken. We are committed to this mission and to getting the job done. For us in Australia we are a country that has been so blessed for so long with democracy—one of the few countries that have enjoyed democracy for more than a century uninterrupted—and we have never really had an enemy on our shores. We must play our role in ensuring that fruits we earn from our democracy are shared amongst other countries less fortunate than ours. In doing that we must also be mindful of the tremendous sacrifices the men and women of Australia's defence forces, Federal Police force and NGOs make in securing that democracy and that freedom for others.

**Dr LEIGH** (Fraser) (6.53 pm)—On the morning of 11 September 2001, I was living in Boston. Standing in the atrium of the Littauer Building of the Harvard Kennedy School I watched up at the television screen and saw smoke pour out of the twin towers. Standing around me were students from around the globe, including many Americans. Some had friends who had boarded flights leaving Boston at 8 am that morning whom they would never see again.

That morning we were supposed to choose our classes. To help us decide Harvard had each professor give a short overview of their course offering. By chance, I entered the room where Professor Michael Ignatieff was presenting his overview. After a minute's silence to remember those who had died that morning, Ignatieff spoke eloquently about international law and the challenges of deciding when to intervene in another nation for humanitarian reasons. He balanced the heart and the head—the need to honour those we have lost while thoughtfully considering the circumstances to justify sending our military overseas.

When I left the classroom, one of the twin towers had fallen. The second would fall soon afterwards. There was little doubt that the attack was planned from Afghanistan. A month later, US forces entered Afghanistan. Australian special forces troops followed soon afterwards. The mission was authorised under UN Security Council Resolution 1386. Since 2006, Australian troops have served in Oruzgan province, providing security and reconstruction.

Nearly a decade on from September 11, our parliament is debating whether Australian troops should remain in Afghanistan. Historically, we have debated such matters about once a decade: most recently in 2002 and, before that, in 1991. Such debates are important not only

for what they say about particular engagements but also for what they say about the general principles that guide Australia in deciding when to send troops abroad.

I am not an isolationist. In 1991, Bob Hawke reminded this parliament of Neville Chamberlain's words of 1938 when he said, 'Why should we be concerned with a faraway country of which we know little?' Hawke reminded the parliament that Chamberlain's answer was provided by the horrific events that followed. 'The great lesson of this century,' said Hawke 'is that peace is bought at too high a price if that price is the appeasement of aggression.'

But, just because it is right to intervene in some circumstances, it does not follow that all international engagements are justified. Opponents of our mission have pointed to Afghanistan's many lasting problems. Afghanistan is one of the poorest parts of the world, and Oruzgan province is one of the poorest parts of Afghanistan, with subsistence-level incomes and literacy rates of one per cent for women and 10 per cent for men. Ninety per cent of public spending in Afghanistan comes from foreign aid and, while NGOs in Afghanistan have done some tremendous work, there is always a risk that those organisations could create parallel institutions and tempt Afghan professionals to leave the bureaucracy.

Yet we have made progress. Modern Afghans are a generation of people who, having come through decades of violence and unimaginable privation, possess a remarkable degree of fair-mindedness. Many seek the establishment of equity under the law and the restoration of social order. For example, the Afghan parliament now features 68 female members and has demonstrated Afghanistan's growing pluralism and commitment to good governance by blocking ministerial candidates that it believes are unqualified or unfit to hold public office. More funding means more built infrastructure, and it is work such as this, in parallel with similar efforts around Afghanistan, that has led to the situation where over six million school age children—2½ million of them young women—are now accessing primary education.

History teaches us very few clear lessons. It is true that, in the 19th century, Afghanistan halted the expansion of the British Empire, massacring complete regiments of British soldiers in the passes outside Kabul. It is also the case that, in the 20th century, the Mujaheddin defeated the Soviet Union's best divisions and hastened communism's collapse. Yet there are major differences between the Soviet occupation of the 1980s and our current attempt to rebuild war-torn Afghanistan. As Afghan Defense Minister Abdul Wardak points out:

Unlike the Russians, who imposed government ... you enabled us to write a democratic constitution ...  
Unlike the Russians, who destroyed the country, you came to rebuild.

I fear that a simplistic portrayal of Afghanistan engenders defeatism and shows a lack of humanism. We must go forward with a new consensus on our continuing role in Afghanistan not only for the benefit of our serving men and women but also for the Afghan people, who deserve the chance to enjoy the benefits of a sovereign democratic nation.

In part, the role of ISAF and the coalition in Afghanistan is a tactical mission, directly targeting those who are planning bombings. In this capacity, a series of articles in last week's *New York Times* suggests that better intelligence and the use of new rocket systems that are accurate to within a metre have severely weakened the Taliban and reduced the number of suicide bombings and rocket attacks on coalition troops and Afghan civilians.

But our mission is more than hunting insurgents. In Afghanistan the international community is working to ensure that the Afghan people can enjoy the fruits of good governance and

stability that have so far eluded their country. For Australia's part, the ADF are engaged in training the 4th Afghan Brigade and providing security, funding and personnel for Oruzgan's provincial reconstruction team, which helps to build local infrastructure and assist with government services.

In my view, there are four reasons why we should stay in Afghanistan. First, we should do so because of our alliance commitments. As the Minister for Foreign Affairs has pointed out, a unanimous resolution of this House formally invoked articles IV and V of the ANZUS Treaty against those responsible for the terrorist attacks on 11 September.

Second, we should do so because of international law. Article 2 of UN Security Council Resolution 1386 calls upon member states to 'contribute personnel, equipment and other resources to ISAF'. Forty-seven nations have heeded that call. Just like Australia, the rest of the international community realises that their position in Afghanistan is driven by a concept of principled engagement. Here there is shared fundamental human compassion, respect for universal human rights and commitment to raise the quality of life and to fight extremist behaviour. Together we share the moral courage to put our country men and women at risk to ensure that these tenets are upheld in a country which beforehand was a byword for conflict and instability.

The third and fourth reasons why we should stay in Afghanistan are that our work is helping reduce the threat of terrorism and that our efforts are helping to improve the humanitarian position of the Afghan people. A generation ago most military experts would have argued that these are fundamentally different missions, but modern counterinsurgency thinking is increasingly demonstrating that they are interwoven.

Training the Afghan 4th Brigade is much more than simply teaching these soldiers how to fight an insurgency. As members of the Australian Defence Force, our instructors believe in the importance of good governance, the rule of law and building civilian institutions. I am optimistic that in time these Afghan soldiers will demonstrate capacity to shield the Oruzgan community from corruption and coercion, not just outright violence.

The provision of government services and infrastructure are the basic weapons against extremism. In his recent book on the root causes of terrorism, Eli Berman argues that 'social service provision creates the institutional base for most of the dangerous radical religious rebels'. To halt extremism, the international community must follow the same approach. We must tackle the fundamental social, political and economic issues that generate the lack of livelihood and the sense of hopelessness that beget extremism wherever they exist. Address these issues and you begin to unravel the extremist organisation.

To really shut down insurgent groups in Afghanistan we must continue to provide the basics: electricity, education, health care and welfare services. In the longer term we also need to be looking at the types of higher education and training that will ensure that young people have the option to build a real livelihood and access secondary services, rather than simply turn to extremism for moral and material sustenance. Just as ISAF special forces soldiers pursue Taliban leaders, the international community must be even more assiduous in providing the social outreach that stops Afghans from joining the insurgency.

The fact that insurgents seek to sabotage such services and attack those who attend demonstrates that building such infrastructure is our most potent way of combating such extremism.

Indeed, counterinsurgency expert David Kilcullen has described this strategy as ‘armed social work’. Using soldiers to protect a newly constructed school is unglamorous but it may be the best way of crippling insurgents in the long run.

In recent months the Australian government has moved to deliver more funding to the reconstruction team that provides just these types of services. Our provincial reconstruction team is now able to access up to 20 per cent of the \$123 million of aid destined for Afghanistan. What happens in Afghanistan directly affects Australians. As Anthony Bubalo and Michael Fullilove have pointed out, Afghanistan helped form the mind of Noordin Top, a terrorist who masterminded a string of bombings directed towards Australians in Indonesia. Bubalo and Fullilove also point out that Afghanistan lies ‘in a region that shares an ocean with Australia; contains two nuclear powers that have come close to war—and in Iran, a possible third—is close to the heart of international energy supplies; has become a major exporter of drugs; and lacks any viable regional security framework’.

It is now clear that we have entered a new stage in our involvement in Afghanistan. This is a new era signalled not merely by the openness with which this debate is being conducted but also by broader changes in counterinsurgency strategy on the part of ISAF. We are entering a transition phase, moving to Afghan lead roles in both security operations and civilian government. This does not mean that foreign troops will be out of Afghanistan by 2014, but it does mean that, by the time of their next presidential election, Afghan forces will be in the lead. Parallel to this will be a process of reconciliation, in which some insurgents who wish to rejoin the mainstream will have the opportunity to do so. Of course, not all groups will have this chance—some are utterly unacceptable—but, as the experience of other countries has shown, insurgencies almost invariably end in negotiation.

Australian forces have continued to re-evaluate how Australian personnel cooperate with Afghanistan’s various stakeholders such as the Afghan government, ISAF and non-government organisations. Our mission also involves integration between our own military and civil agencies. There are 50 to 60 Australian government civilians in Afghanistan today, including 28 Australian Federal Police members and a number of DFAT and AusAID personnel. I am proud of the work these public servants are doing, not least because about half of them live in my electorate.

The lessons learnt on the ground and from our international partners in Afghanistan will serve Australia well in future stabilisation efforts. In the coming decades Australia and the international community will often have to make rapid decisions on whether to intervene to counter extremism and avoid destabilisation.

When it comes to intervening in other countries, the international community in the past has made mistakes. Many have argued that we should not have intervened in Vietnam. And in retrospect, we should have intervened earlier in Rwanda.

Yet sometimes war is just. In World War I my great-grandfather was a radio operator on an Australian Navy ship off German New Guinea. In World War II my grandfather was an army medic in Bougainville. I am proud of both of their service.

More recently Australia can be proud of our own deployments that have supported our values—deployments which have showed that we can adapt to and confront challenging social and political landscapes far from home soil. In our current efforts in East Timor, in the Solo-

mon Islands and, of course, in Afghanistan from 2001 to today, Australia is continuing to rebuild societies and save lives.

For the future, there is no simple test that determines when and how we should intervene, but some principles should guide our thinking. As our nation has always done, we must honour the fallen, for there is no greater sacrifice than to lay down your life for your country. Yet our decisions must be made based on future costs and future benefits not just to our own personnel but to affected civilians. No decision today can bring back those lives that have been tragically lost.

We must also realise the complexity of the moral and leadership challenge before us. The political calculus must not be to ensure a crude 'exit strategy' but be to deliver a good and honourable humanitarian outcome for these most vulnerable.

**Mr NEUMANN (Blair)** (7.08 pm)—Some have argued in this place that Afghanistan is in the 'too hard' basket—it is just not worth the effort. It is another Vietnam, they say. We are told that Alexander the Great took one look and went home. Genghis Khan could not be bothered. The Russians gave up. We are being asked to accept that, because three of the most ruthless empire builders in history did not bother with Afghanistan, we should not either. The fatal flaw with that argument is that we are not in Afghanistan to build an empire. We are not there to subjugate or enslave; we are there to help. We are in Afghanistan to help establish a secure, functioning democracy—a country where respect for the law, tolerance of difference and peace are the norm.

Citing the failures or lack of interest of others over millennia as a sound rationale for leaving Afghanistan to fall in the hands of terrorists and extremists is a nonsense. It is precisely because it is difficult that it demands much of us that would be worth seeing through. Nothing worth having comes easily. If we just give up—wash our hands, walk away—we will leave a people at the mercy of those who have no respect for human life, who espouse a hate-filled, destructive, distorted fanaticism and who believe that educating girls and women is evil.

The federal Labor government is not cowardly. Labor does not run from tough fights. Social democrats do not flinch. We believe in the prosecution of just wars. It was Labor who saw us through World War I, Labor who saw us through World War II and Labor who saw us through the first Gulf War. Throughout Labor's history we have demonstrated time and time again that the difficult battles are the ones worth fighting. Whether it is for fair pay, safe working conditions or support for those who are less empowered—all the hard won achievements that better people's lives—these battles make a real difference to the world, to the future and to people, regardless of where they live. This federal Labor government has the courage, the fortitude and the tenacity to see it through, to work with our partners to help give the people of Afghanistan a hand—a lift up, a lasting chance at peace and democracy—to enjoy the rights and freedoms we readily take for granted in this country. It is this federal Labor government that will continue the very difficult task of helping the Afghani people, of supporting them in creating a country where their children can prosper and their girls can be educated—a place of peace and democracy.

Our involvement in Afghanistan is not about altruism, although the outcomes are worthy of that title. Our involvement is centred on the national interest as well—to prevent an insidious and brutal force establishing itself as a globally destructive regime within a sympathetic and secure base. Making sure the extremists do not put down permanent roots in Afghanistan is in

Australia's national and best interest. We are opposed to Islamic extremists, narcoterrorists and fundamentalist fascists who brutally slaughtered Australian citizens and the citizens of our ally nations. This is a big ask. It is a really tough mission, but this federal Labor government does not shrink from the big challenges, and it will not shed its principles for expediency. We all know that the war in Afghanistan has been and continues to be very difficult, but it is legal. As recently as 13 October this year, the UN Security Council renewed the mandate of the International Security Assistance Force of 47 nations in Afghanistan.

We see the tragic loss of Australian lives: 21 soldiers have lost their lives—21 Australians, 21 families. This is a sorrow that rests heavily on our collective heart. We continue to send our brave soldiers to fight on foreign soil against a wily and ruthless opponent. These are grave sacrifices. Hundreds have been injured as well, and that is not to be taken lightly. But it is crystal clear that these sacrifices are paying off—frustratingly and painfully slowly. Because of our involvement in Afghanistan in partnership with 46 other countries of the ISAF, more Afghani children are going to school. Six million attend school regularly, and 40 per cent of those are girls—girls who will have their dreams fulfilled. Already we have supported 78 school reconstruction projects. Women who suffered so cruelly under the previous Taliban regime are now running for parliament. Small businesses are emerging, and we have disbursed over 950 microfinance loans. We are helping refurbish hospitals and assisting in the rehabilitation of health centres and health posts. We are constructing a new building for the Department of Energy and Water and constructing bridge crossings.

We are training and mentoring the 4th Brigade of the Afghan National Army to take responsibility for their own country's security. Democracy is emerging in Afghanistan. We know the Karzai government is not without its failings, faults and foibles. Democracy is admittedly shaky in Afghanistan but it is taking its first tentative steps and it is gradually finding its feet, nonetheless. The Prime Minister expects Australia's presence in Afghanistan to remain until 2020 at least. She has made it clear that we believe our timetable of two to four years for training the Afghan national security forces—the army and the police—where they are currently located in Oruzgan province is appropriate and in accordance with international expectations and the expectation of the Karzai government.

The Taliban, which harboured al-Qaeda within Afghanistan, refuse to contemplate surrender, but only when faced with force will they respect democracy and respect the efforts of the Afghani people who are fighting them. Each of the gains we have made has been painful and there have been many. To abandon this process, to abandon the progress which has been made, to run away from the challenge now, I think is to gamble ruthlessly with the lives of peaceloving friends and allies but of peaceloving Afghani people as well. It would be to desert every mother who wants a better life for her child, particularly her daughter, and it would snuff out the hopes of millions for a better life.

We must remember that 88 Australians were killed in the Bali bombing in 2002, four Australians were killed in the second Bali bombing in 2005 and our embassy in Jakarta was bombed. In each of these cases the terrorist groups involved had links with extremists and fundamentalist fascists in Afghanistan. To put our heads in the sand will only ensure that these types of incidents will occur again. We have to be vigilant, we have to be determined and we have to be committed. The goal of the international community must remain to deny terrorist networks a safe haven in Afghanistan. We are in Afghanistan because it is in our vital national

interests to be there alongside our friend and ally the United States of America. We are there legally in accordance with the obligations that we have undertaken in the ANZUS treaty. We are there legally in defence of our national interests and in accordance with UN resolutions. On 11 September 2001 al-Qaeda killed 3,000 innocent people from 90 countries in a dreadful attack in the United States of America. All of us will remember when that happened, just as our forebears remember where they were when Harold Holt went missing or John F Kennedy was assassinated.

In my electorate the RAAF base at Amberley is located and Ipswich is a military town. The people there are committed to support the troops in Afghanistan. My daughter's friends are there; my friends have been there; and our friends from the RAAF base at Amberley, the Air Force and Army personnel have been in the Middle East. They have made sacrifices for us and undertaken service for us. The hardest thing I have had to do since I have been elected to this place was attend the repatriation services at the RAAF base at Amberley alongside the then defence minister, Senator John Faulkner. On these occasions the bodies of fallen Australian soldiers have been returned to their loved ones, their bodies in caskets carried on the shoulders of their comrades out of a C17 aircraft, through a military guard and into the embrace of their mothers and fathers, wives and partners, brothers and sisters. On these occasions words of comfort and solace seem inadequate and trite. But in the conversations with the loved ones of the fallen diggers, the message to us is always the same: in their grief they are proud of the sacrifices made by their loved ones. Their husband, their partner, their son or their brother believed they were doing good, making a difference and helping the Afghani people. I respect their view. I agree with them. I stand with them. I support our military efforts in Afghanistan. I support our civilian assistance in Afghanistan. I support our troops in Afghanistan.

**Mr FLETCHER** (Bradfield) (7.20 pm)—This is a very important debate. Fifteen hundred and fifty Australian personnel are deployed in Afghanistan. Twenty-one have died; over 150 have been wounded. By any measure, we are paying and we have paid a significant price to be in Afghanistan. Twenty-one men have paid an unimaginably high price. Their family and friends face enormous and continuing loss. The injured in many cases face a life fundamentally changed. So why are we in Afghanistan and should we stay there? This is a question best answered, I suggest, in two parts. I want to speak firstly about why Australia joined in the invasion of Afghanistan, a decision I believe that was absolutely correct, before turning to the more difficult question of what we should do now.

We went into Afghanistan as part of an international response to the terrorist outrage of September 11, 2001. Nearly 3,000 people died when four aircraft were hijacked. Two were flown into the two World Trade Centre buildings and a third was flown into the Pentagon. The fourth was apparently aiming at the White House but ended up crashing in rural Pennsylvania, evidently after a struggle between terrorists and passengers. The attacks were coordinated by the Islamic terrorist organisation al-Qaeda. Al-Qaeda is closely linked with the Taliban, the extremist Islamic organisation which took power in Afghanistan in the late nineties. Al-Qaeda members lived and trained in Afghanistan and their leader, Osama bin Laden, lived there.

The US and the UK responded to the outrage of September 11 by launching military operations against the Taliban in October 2001. The United Nations Security Council, by resolution 1386, passed on 20 December 2001, authorised the establishment of the International Security

Assistance Force. Its initial mission was Kabul and surrounding areas, and in 2003 a further resolution expanded its role to the whole of Afghanistan. The expanded mission has been regularly reinforced by subsequent Security Council resolutions.

Australia has been involved to varying degrees in Afghanistan since 2001, although our forces were reduced to very low levels between 2003 and 2005, with more emphasis given to the war in Iraq at that time. From 2006, Australian special forces were redeployed and today we have 1,550 personnel operating as the Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force in Oruzgan province.

In my view, the decision to go into Afghanistan originally was absolutely correct. We needed to be part of a united effort by the Western world, by civilised, advanced nations, to respond to an appalling attack by extremist terrorists. Our way of life in Australia is based upon the values and principles of a modern, democratic, capitalist, pluralist world. We benefit enormously from being part of a community of nations with similar values, led by the United States but also including the nations of Europe, Canada and New Zealand, and many nations in Asia, South America and elsewhere.

We share core values. In these nations you are free to worship as you choose. You have the right to cast a vote to determine who governs you. If you have a grievance you can go to court for redress. If you are accused of a crime you will receive a fair trial. Our people travel freely back and forth between these nations and others for education, for work and for leisure. We read each other's newspapers and books. The universities of each nation generate knowledge which benefits all. Our economies are intertwined. There is much cross-investment and trade, which benefits us all. Most importantly, in these nations citizens are free to pursue their goals and ambitions in life, to make a better life for themselves and their families, to seek education or to seek fortune to help others, and to do these things in as many different ways as they may choose.

September 11 2001 saw a vicious attack on these values and the nations which embody them. We were attacked by a group of extremists who believe in a primitive, fundamentalist theology and who use the force of arms to impose on all within their control the obligation to follow their beliefs. This attack happened to occur on United States soil, but it was an attack against all of us in the West. As we know all too painfully, it was followed by an attack in Bali in 2002, where 88 Australians were killed; an attack on the Australian Embassy in Indonesia in 2004; the London train and bus bombings in 2005; another attack in Bali in 2005; and the attack on hotels in Jakarta in 2009. The evidence suggests that every one of these attacks was planned and executed from terrorist safe havens in Afghanistan.

We are facing an attack on our way of life and on our values. The West had no choice but to respond, firstly, to demonstrate that those who are opposed to what we stand for cannot attack us with impunity but, secondly, to seek to root out the problem by removing the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and replacing it with a more stable government which no longer provided a safe haven for terrorists. To achieve that latter objective, we needed to work to deliver a better life and better outcomes for the people of Afghanistan, because without that you will not achieve stability in that country.

It would have been feasible for Australia to decline to participate in that international effort, an effort conducted under the auspices of the United Nations and one with such widespread international engagement and approval that 47 nations are involved in the International

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Security Assistance Force. We could have done that. We could have stayed on the sidelines. But would that have been the right thing for us to do? We are, as I have mentioned, part of a community of nations which share core values, and those values are under attack. Would it have been the right thing for us to do to stand idly by, to do nothing? Would it have been right for us to keep our armed forces safely at home in their barracks when young American men and women, young British men and women and the men and women of many other countries were exposing themselves to enormous danger in the defence of those shared values? I do not think that would have been right. Just as importantly, I do not think it would have been in Australia's national interest. Our national security is critically reliant on our alliance, firstly, with the United States and, secondly, with other Western nations such as the UK, to which I have referred. For us to stand by while our allies entered a conflict to protect our shared way of life would have seriously weakened those security relationships.

The question of what we should have done in 2001 is one thing. Today, of course, we face an even harder question. We are in Afghanistan. We have been there, to varying degrees, for nine years. It is a difficult war. We are fighting against an enemy which is hard to distinguish from the local civilian population. We are fighting to support a regime, the Karzai regime, which is very far from perfect. We are fighting a war in circumstances where the objectives have changed and reduced since we began. We are fighting a war which is increasingly costly to Australia not only in economic terms but, vastly more importantly, in human terms. Should we stay in or is it right for us to pull out now? That is the question which faces Australia. In my view, it is also the key point which answers the argument which is made by some, including the Greens. Afghanistan is a failed state and terrorist haven, they say, but so are other places, like Somalia, yet we are not in Somalia. That is quite true and that is precisely the point. We are not in Somalia. Hence, we do not face the decision about whether to stay or go. In Afghanistan we do. That is our choice.

In my view, the right way to analyse this question, to analyse the decision which faces the Australian government, is to recognise two realities. The first is that we are part of an international coalition led by the United States. We are not the decision maker. We may have some modest capacity to influence the thinking of the US through our diplomatic relations, although we should not overstate that, but we are not the decision maker in terms of the overall international effort. Clearly, if the United States were not in this war, we would not be in it. The second reality is that, sooner or later, the US will exit this war. It will cease to have a military presence in Afghanistan. It may be in one year; it may be in five years. Very clearly, at that point at the very latest, we will exit too.

Let me in passing make the point that no nation on earth has the track record of the United States for entering other countries, stabilising them, getting them back on their feet and then exiting. Why is Japan a stable and prosperous democracy today? It is because, after a vicious conflict in World War II, the United States occupied Japan, its former enemy, and helped it; and when Japan was ready to be independent the US troops went home. Germany is a stable and prosperous democracy today because of the wise, far-sighted, generous and humane conduct of the United States immediately after World War II. So too is much of Europe. The US is not perfect, of course, but at their finest, the values displayed by the US are very much to be admired. It is far from irrelevant that this is the nation which is leading the international effort in Afghanistan.

That being said, the decision which the US and its international allies face in Afghanistan is a very difficult one. We have not secured a comprehensive victory or anything like it. We have not established Afghanistan as a prosperous, liberal democracy. But I do not think that we should be wholly gloomy. We have certainly demonstrated very clearly that you do not launch terrorist attacks against Western targets and Western civilisation without facing a powerful response. Of course the world would be a better place if it were not necessary to use force, but when you are dealing with evil people who are prepared to use it themselves, regrettably there is sometimes no choice but to respond. We have hugely disrupted the Taliban and tipped them out of government, and we have made some modest, cautious progress in stabilising Afghanistan and delivering some benefits to the population. The work of the Australian mission in Oruzgan province is an important part of that.

The real problem is that the outcome is finely balanced. An ill-judged pullout could leave Afghanistan vulnerable to the Taliban taking power again and making that nation once again an international terrorist haven. The aim of the international community in due course must be to depart from Afghanistan in a way which leaves that nation best able to govern itself and to guard itself against the Taliban or other unsavoury forces.

For Australia, the choice we face today is whether to exit now and leave more of a burden on our friends and allies or to exit later. To stay in is costly. There will be more deaths. There will be more devastated Australians. There will be more children growing up without fathers. We politicians, comfortably situated here in Canberra, cannot pretend to really understand the sacrifices that soldiers and their families make. As other speakers have correctly noted, there is little we can say that is of genuine assistance to families when a son, father, brother or partner has made the ultimate sacrifice. But the hard fact of more pain and death to come is not of itself sufficient to make our decision. As a nation we have to decide whether to stay in while our allies stay in.

We went into Afghanistan because our civilisation was under attack. For the moment, we continue to make progress in stabilising Afghanistan and helping it to re-emerge as a more stable and secure nation. It is slow and painful progress, hard won, and there are many reversals and defeats. We have a worthwhile goal to aim for: to exit at a time when Afghanistan has a reasonable prospect of making it on its own. If the international community, led by the US, ever makes the judgment that even that goal is unreachable then it would be logical to exit. If we reach the point at which that goal is achieved, we should exit. But we are not, I would suggest, at either point yet, and for those reasons the international community has not yet made a decision to exit.

In these circumstances, I believe that although staying in will undoubtedly expose Australia to further pain—in particular, for Australian service personnel and their families who, sadly, may experience further difficulty and tragedy—I nevertheless believe that we should not be making the decision to exit at this time, that we should remain as part of the international coalition in Afghanistan.

**Ms BURKE** (Chisholm) (7.34 pm)—Madam Deputy Speaker Bird, a general once said:

I hate war as only a soldier who has lived it can, only as one who has seen its brutality, its futility, its stupidity.

So said Dwight Eisenhower, a former five-star general in the United States Army and the 34th President of the United States. I also hate futility and, while this debate is a welcome opportu-

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nity, after nine years, to explore Australians' commitment to the war, sadly, I know it will not result in any practical ramifications regarding Australia's military involvement in Afghanistan. It will provide the opportunity for politicians to voice our views in respect of this complex issue but, considering the broad parliamentary support for the war and the lack of parliamentary process, nothing will change. Will this debate lead to greater public engagement in this issue, or is the debate largely restricted to politicians and the press gallery? If the former eventuates then that of course is a good thing, but I fear the latter will be the reality.

I cannot comprehend how killing people will change hearts and minds. A recent commentary in the *Australian* stated:

The best military minds in the coalition have been warning for two years that it cannot kill its way to victory in Afghanistan.

When we read about Afghanistan in the papers, it is more often than not concerning the death of a foreign soldier. I want to put on the record my admiration for the men and women of our Defence forces who voluntarily seek to serve our nation in magnificent style in confronting circumstances, knowing that they risk life and limb. Never is one of their lives given in vain. The fact that 21 Australian soldiers have lost their lives as a result of this war is an immense tragedy. Those young men have made the ultimate sacrifice while serving their country, and my deepest sympathy goes to their families. Their families and our communities will be poorer for the lives those men will not lead and the contribution they would have made if their lives had not been cut so short. I also want to put on the record my thoughts for the many who have returned injured and traumatised from this conflict.

On another level, it is saddening that the deaths and miseries of civilians in Afghanistan are largely overlooked by the mainstream media and are rarely reported in a meaningful manner. Indeed, they have been rarely talked about in this debate. I find it deeply disturbing that we cannot even nominate a ballpark figure for the number of Afghans killed since the beginning of this war in 2001. Most estimates range between 14,000 and 44,000 civilian deaths—a huge discrepancy for which there is no adequate justification. Additionally, this figure could be expanded by tens of thousands when you consider those deaths caused by displacement, starvation, disease, exposure, lack of medical treatment, crime and lawlessness during this war. What we know is that the human cost of conflict in Afghanistan is escalating in 2010. Indeed, as stated by the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan:

... nine years into the conflict, measures to protect Afghan civilians effectively and to minimise the impact of the conflict on basic human rights are more urgent than ever.

The Afghanistan Rights Monitor says that 2010 has been the worst year for insecurity since the demise of the Taliban regime in 2001. Not only has the number of security incidents increased but the space and depth of insurgency and counterinsurgency related violence have maximised dramatically. The UNAMA recorded 1,271 deaths, and 1,997 deaths in the first half of this year, telling me this amounts to a 21 per cent increase over the number documented in the first half of 2009.

The Taliban and other antigovernment forces show no respect for the rules of war and civilian life. They have proven they care little for the safety and protection of noncombatants. We know they are increasingly undertaking unlawful means of warfare such as the use of improvised explosion devices, suicide attacks and assassination. As the UNAMA states, this violates:

Basic human rights and international humanitarian law principles of distinction, proportionality and precaution that apply to all parties to an armed conflict, requiring them to minimize civilian loss of life and injury must be reinforced at this critical period.

As well as targeting military objectives, a number of attacks committed by antigovernment forces have occurred in civilian areas where there is no clear military target. Improvised bombs have been planted on public roads, in bazaars, in agricultural fields and even in front of schools, clearly targeting and affecting the civilian population. Suicide bombers, particularly in densely populated and civilian areas, have continuously tormented communities throughout the country. The indiscriminate nature of suicide attacks and the fact they occur in highly populated locations ensure they inflict catastrophic outcomes on the civilian population. It is clear from the brutal tactics employed by the insurgents that the international military forces are facing a fiercely violent and unscrupulous enemy.

A tragic reality of the war is the fact that the international military forces cannot escape blame for the deaths of Afghani civilians either. As the UNAMA notes, civilians continue to be killed, injured and arbitrarily detained and their property damaged or destroyed as a result of some operations of the international military and the Afghani national security forces. Twelve per cent of the total civilian casualties in the first half of this year have been attributed to pro-government forces. While this is down 30 per cent from the first six months of 2009, it still amounts to 386 deaths. This is far too many civilian casualties. Of particular concern is that women and children have made up a greater proportion of those killed and injured than in 2009. Unsurprisingly, Afghans have demonstrated a strong sensitivity to civilian casualties committed by foreign forces. As Brendan Nicholson commented in the *Australian* last week:

Every death of a civilian caught in coalition crossfire or in a Taliban bomb is likely to be blamed on the war and foreign troops. Each of those deaths has a dreadful multiplier effect as relatives swear vengeance.

A number of emotional demonstrations have taken place in different parts of Afghanistan against the alleged killings of civilian people by foreign forces. There are serious questions that need to be asked about what effect our military presence has on radicalising Islamic youth and strengthening support for extremist ideology. Islam is not a terrorist organisation; it is a religious faith. All faiths have extremists and all extremists have utilised violence in pursuit of ideology. I ask: does the current military strategy produce the consequences it is attempting to prevent?

Concerns exist that the presence of international forces in Afghanistan actually attracts foreign militants to the country and provides ideal recruiting opportunities for the Taliban and antigovernment forces. In a comprehensive study of suicide attacks, Robert Pape found that the motivation for 95 per cent of terrorist attacks was related to the military occupation of culture and economic dominance of a country with which the terrorists identified. A statement from the Taliban from May this year seems to support this connection where they announced that they would be targeting the Americans, the NATO military personnel, foreign advisers, spies who pose as foreign diplomats, members of the Karzai administration, contractors of foreign and domestic private security companies, contractors and personnel of military logistics and military construction companies, and all supporters of foreign invaders who are working for the strengthening of foreign domination.

A significant proportion of the Afghan population believes our presence in their country is the real problem in this war. I ask: is our military involvement doing more harm than good? It is suggested that the Australian defence budget is 10 times that of our aid budget to Afghanistan. Given the deep level of poverty in Afghanistan, this seems somewhat misaligned. Afghanistan has all but the lowest human development on record. It ranks at 181 of 182 on the United Nations human development index. There is an estimated 42 per cent of the population living below the poverty line, up from 33 per cent in 2005. An additional 20 per cent of the population are hovering just above the poverty line and are highly vulnerable to shocks and fluctuations in household income and consumption.

Afghanistan has one of the lowest literacy rates in the world with only 28 per cent of the total population literate. The figure is just 18 per cent for women and girls. It is the most food insecure country on the planet, according to the Food Security Risk Index 2010. These statistics provide a reflection of the immense poverty facing the country. If we want to make long-lasting change in Afghanistan, I believe greater emphasis needs to be placed on addressing these fundamentals. Australia's military contribution stands at around 1,500 personnel via Operation Slipper, defined as Australia's military contribution to the international campaign against terrorism—a campaign I support. This is a considerable contribution. With no clear date for the withdrawal or scaling down of our military involvement, our troops will remain in harm's way for some time to come.

This is a conflict in which victory is not clearly defined. What does victory look like? A peaceful Afghanistan governed by a genuinely democratic government is not something that can be achieved through military means, or has ever been achieved through military means. Realistically it is not something that will be achieved for many, many years. So how much longer will our troops continue to work, to risk their lives on the front line of this war, and how many more civilians need to die? And what measures will we adopt to determine when it is time to withdraw?

It is worth noting the historical record of military involvement in Afghanistan and the fact that there has never been a successful intervention by a foreign power. During the 19th century the British invaded the country on two occasions and failed to achieve their objectives. More recently, the Soviet invasion in 1979 failed miserably, with the Mujaheddin, along with fighters from several other Arab nations, driving the Soviet troops out of the country within a decade. Experience has taught Afghans to treat Western involvement in their country with a degree of cynicism. Winning the hearts and minds of the Afghan public is critical, and I am not convinced this will be achieved through military means, particularly when we consider the history of the West's involvement within this country. The independent research organisation, the Williams Foundation, said, 'Without exception wars lead to injustice and depravity.' With civilian and military deaths in the tens of thousands and with the definition of victory ambiguous, I believe it is time to cease Australia's military involvement in Afghanistan. Our presence in Afghanistan is fuelling the extremist ideology we are trying to eradicate. Already 21 young Australians have lost their lives as a result of our engagement. Let us not leave when the body count of Australian Defence Force personnel is too high for the public to tolerate. That would be a cynical exercise in the extreme.

**Mrs BRONWYN BISHOP** (Mackellar) (7.46 pm)—I have had the great honour to represent on more than one occasion the Leader of the Opposition at a ramp ceremony to receive

home the body of one of our soldiers who served our nation and paid the ultimate price. On those occasions it is a time one feels a sense of ceremony, respect, the family's heartache and the pride of the family in the soldier who has died serving his nation. I think the camaraderie of the soldiers who were present on those occasions mirrors the strong Australian tradition of mateship; the Anzac tradition passes to this day to our serving forces and remains a strong and binding force. To see parents, brothers and sisters, wives and girlfriends mourn the loss of a soldier and yet have enormous pride in the fact that he felt he was doing what he believed was right for his country and carried out his duties to the best of his ability is something that pierces you to the very core. Every Anzac Day we commemorate and praise the spirit of Anzac, but to see it alive in the hearts of those who have lost someone so recently is truly awesome.

This debate has been brought about because there are some who hold the view—and we have just heard one—that we should withdraw from Afghanistan. I am not one of those. I am one who believes that the role we are playing in Afghanistan is important and that our soldiers who serve there deserve to hear from their members of parliament that they are supported in the endeavours they are undertaking.

I intend to trace the steps that we went through to play our part in Afghanistan, because I think that in this sort of debate it is important to place it on the record. President Bush launched Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan following the New York September 11 attacks in 2001. The aim of the mission was to destroy terrorist training camps and infrastructure within Afghanistan, capture al-Qaeda leaders and stop terrorist activities in Afghanistan. I well remember those planes flying into the towers in New York. I was in Tasmania, speaking at a Meals on Wheels conference, and I came back to my room at the end of the dinner and saw the images on the screen. I thought it had to be a movie; I could not believe it was real. It was not until the second plane flew into the tower, about 20 minutes after the first plane, that the enormity of it really struck me. Later, in early 2002, when I visited New York and went to that scene of destruction and devastation, and indeed I attended the President's prayer breakfast where heroes who had lost their lives during their endeavours were being remembered—firemen and others who had assisted in rescuing people—the enormity really sank in for me. It was when the United States made its case to the NATO Secretary General and the NATO Council said that compelling and conclusive evidence was that the attacks on 11 September 2001 were the work of al-Qaeda, who were being protected by the Taliban, that our commitment began.

The United Nations Security Council resolution 1386 on 20 December 2001 allowed for the establishment of the International Security Assistance Force—ISAF—as a NATO-led security mission in Afghanistan. It is reaffirmed by the United Nations each year. By 2002, 136 countries had offered a range of assistance, including 55 countries providing military assistance. Australia invoked the ANZUS treaty and joined coalition forces in military action in Afghanistan from the very beginning. This was the first time since 1952 that the treaty's clauses on acting to meet a common danger had been invoked. The coalition government's decision to join a military action was made with the bipartisan support of the Australian Labor Party, under the leadership of Kim Beazley.

Progress in Afghanistan's development over the past nine years is really quite impressive, and I think it needs to be on the record, because there is some—shall we say—war-weariness

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in the public and I think the public deserves to hear what is being achieved. Firstly, there has been a dramatic increase in school enrolments, from around one million in 2001, none of whom were girls, to over six million today, of which one-third, or over two million, are girls. We have seen a significant increase in the availability of basic health services, which were available to less than 10 per cent of the population under the former Taliban regime but are now extended to around 85 per cent of people; the identification and management of over 39,000 community based infrastructure projects, such as wells, clinics and roads, in over 22,000 communities throughout Afghanistan through the Afghan-led National Solidarity Program; and the rehabilitation of almost 10,000 kilometres of rural roads, supporting the employment of hundreds of thousands of local workers through the National Rural Access Program. The telecommunications industry has created about 100,000 jobs since 2001. Ten million Afghans today have access to telecommunications, compared to 20,000 in 2001. Afghanistan's national economic growth has been strong, from a low base. It has averaged 11 per cent since 2002 and was 22 per cent in 2009-10—off the back of a strong harvest, according to the World Bank.

There have been two elections for the lower house of parliament since 2001. Around 27 per cent of seats in the lower house and one-sixth of the seats in the upper house are reserved for female members. The lower house has significant powers, including the right to reject or approve draft laws, to hold votes of no confidence in government ministers and to reject cabinet nominees. The Taliban suppresses free speech. Afghan people now have access to over 400 print media publications, 150 FM radio stations and 26 television channels. These give Afghans an outlet to discuss publicly issues that were previously off limits—most importantly, issues such as human rights abuses and women's rights. Under the Taliban, women were indeed slaves by any definition.

Australia's military contribution to the ISAF in Afghanistan is deployed under Operation Slipper. Australia's military contribution includes around 1,500 Australian Defence Force personnel who are deployed within Afghanistan, of whom 1,241 are deployed in Oruzgan province and around 300 in Kabul, Kandahar and elsewhere in Afghanistan. These numbers vary depending on operational requirements and shifting seasonal conditions. Eight hundred and thirty personnel provide support from locations within the broader Middle East Area of Operations including our maritime commitment. In keeping with the ISAF strategy to strengthen civilian engagement in Afghanistan and to better integrate civilian and military efforts, in April 2010 the Australian government announced a 50 per cent increase in Australia's civilian contribution to Afghanistan. We now have around 50 civilians working in Afghanistan in addition to around 10 defence civilian personnel.

Our substantial military, civilian and developmental assistance focuses on training and monitoring the Afghan National Army 4th Brigade in Oruzgan province to assume responsibility for the province's security, building the capacity of the Afghan National Police to assist with civil policing functions, helping to improve the Afghan government's capacity to deliver core services and generate income-earning opportunities for its people, and operations to disrupt insurgent operations and supply routes utilising the Special Operations Task Force. This is a catalogue of strategic work carried out by Australians, always with their lives at risk but always with the courage that we have come to know, admire and respect in our Australian soldiers. Both men and women who are serving in Afghanistan do us proud. If we look back

over the history of battles and wars in which Australia has been involved, we see that when we, the political body, have the courage to back the courage of our Australian troops we are successful. When we lose courage we let them down. So it is of absolutely pivotal importance with this debate that we are having in this parliament that our troops know that they have our confidence, that we believe that what they are doing is the right thing and that we believe in them carrying it out with integrity and bravery and in accordance with the rules of engagement but, overall, knowing that the Australian people admire and respect them.

**Ms OWENS** (Parramatta) (7.58 pm)—Until this very moment, I was not sure how I would start this speech. I have to say that, probably like many people, I feel conflicted. I do not think anyone wants our soldiers in a place of danger. I think that in our hearts we all want them home. But unfortunately these decisions are quite often made with our heads. I would just like to say upfront that I believe absolutely that the government of the day, our present government, and our military leaders, have made the decision to be where we are for all the right reasons, and I support their decision absolutely.

I, along with Philip Ruddock and Senator Fielding, was extremely privileged to visit Afghanistan earlier this year as part of an exchange program between the Australian Defence Force and the parliament. We were there for nine days, plus two days of travel. We were well and truly on the ground. We mixed with the troops at every level: in the gym, in the mess and waiting between one event and another. We were briefed by General Petraeus and we were briefed by the departing leader of the Dutch forces and at the highest level of the Australian forces. We were incredibly privileged to be there.

That was my third brief stint with the military. I was with the NORFORCE up in the Northern Territory on the Tiwi Islands for a week a couple of years ago and I did a week's basic training at Kapooka last year. I have to say that I did not go to Oruzgan province specifically in order to consider whether or not our role in Afghanistan was right or not. I actually went, as my colleagues did, to learn more about our Defence forces so that we, as members of parliament, could provide them with the support they need in the way they carry out their duties.

I want to say that, like my colleagues, the one thing you absolutely find when you spend time with our forces is that they are rightly seen as one of the best-trained forces in the world. They are exceptionally committed, unbelievably well trained and some of the best troops in the world at the kind of work that we are doing in Oruzgan.

They are some of the nicest people you will meet, actually—some of the most polite people and with an extraordinary sense of honour and duty. Even though I was raised in a military suburb, I continue to be amazed at the decisions these men and women make when they decide to serve our country in the way that they do. For those of us who spend small periods of time in relative safety in places even like Oruzgan, we will never know what they live through so that we can live lives that are not touched by the violence that touches so many civilians in other countries around the world. We owe them our greatest debt.

We were there when the election was called, by the way—just as an aside. The election was called on day 5. We were not allowed to tell people we were going in the first place and we were not allowed to tell people we were there, so the three of us disappeared from the radar for 11 days, including the first week of the campaign. That was an interesting time for us and for the soldiers, by the way, because they very much wanted to discuss an election that was

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happening a long way away. For them, of course, the decisions made by government profoundly affect how well they are able to do the job that they choose to do for us. That was an interesting time.

We arrived just in time for the ramp ceremony for Private Nathan Bewes. We arrived at the tarmac at almost the same time as he was being escorted by his comrades into the Hercules to fly back. That well and truly introduced us to life in Oruzgan, and if we had not already noticed when we got on the charter flight with troops going there for the first time, we well and truly began to come to terms with what life is like for our soldiers working for us as they do in Oruzgan.

As I said, I was in relative safety, as we all were in the compound at Tarin Kowt. I shared a chalet—as it is called, quite wrongly I think, but chalet is the word they use—with three female soldiers. Again, I was able to talk with them and many others about the way they felt about being there, and I want to share that with you more than anything else today. It was the chalet which was subject to a rocket attack two weeks before I arrived, and I did spend quite a bit of time in body armour. It was a truly amazing experience. The camp there could be described as a hellhole. It is 40 degrees plus, and there is so much dust you can barely see 300 metres. Because of the philosophy of the Dutch and the Australians in particular, the camp is not built in any permanent way. There are no permanent structures. The trade training centre where the members of the military train some of the local kids in basic trade skills does have some permanent structures, mainly built by the kids themselves. The police training compound has permanent structures and the camp of the 4th Brigade, which is the Afghan army, has permanent structures. But the rest of the camp, quite rightly, does not.

The conditions in which the troops live there on constant alert for rocket attacks have to be experienced to be believed. One of the first things you do when you get there is to learn to apply a tourniquet to one arm with your other arm. Australia has a very clever invention, a tourniquet which is essentially a rag and a stick, except it is made out of velcro. It is very clever. The assumption is always that you only have one arm at that point. You wear that tourniquet strapped to your chest for most of the rest of your trip. It is your basic piece of equipment. This is a very dangerous place and some of our troops who provide the advance movement for their comrades in searching out the IEDs live with a level of danger that would break many of us and will break many of them. Again, it is an extremely dangerous place.

The overwhelming sense that you get from the troops when you are there is that they believe that is where they should be. These are extraordinary men and women. They were free to talk to us; there was no commanding officer with us. We were wandering and we could talk to anyone, and they were free to talk to us. And they did. But there is no doubt in my mind that the overwhelming feeling I got from the men and women there is that they believed that they absolutely should be there, that it was a just fight, that they were winning, that they were making real headway and that we had to stay the course.

I would say though that that is not a reason why a government should choose to stay. These are good people. These people will choose to defend the weak and choose to stay if they think there is work to be done. That is their nature and we are lucky to have them. But I want the parliament to know that when you talk to these men and women they absolutely believe that it is where they should be.

The other overwhelming thing that you find when you get there is that while we in Australia talk about Australian troops in Afghanistan, this is an extraordinary international force. The troops there talk about ISAF and they talk about the international forces more often than they talk about the Australian force. We are, of course, part of quite a large force—the International Security Assistance Force under the UN Security Council mandate. There are 47 nations in that force, and we met people from around the world and, again, had the opportunity to talk to them about their contribution.

The Australian contribution is quite specific. It is about training the Afghan 4th Brigade. That is essentially what we do. There is an overwhelming understanding among the allies in Afghanistan that the role that we have there is making sure that Afghanistan can manage itself in a safe environment—that if we were to leave now the Taliban would be back in great numbers and that we are actually winning and driving them back. We are driving them and pursuing them into areas that they have not been before, as they move back up into the hills, which are more dangerous places. There is in Afghanistan a thing called the ‘fighting season’, when the fighting becomes much more aggressive. There are times of the year when there is very little fighting. As odd as it sounds, that happens to coincide with the harvest of the poppy crop. When the harvest is on, the fighting is not. So it is a very strange place in many ways, but there is no doubt that our troops believe that we are actually making serious progress and doing a job that is absolutely worth doing.

There is also a general sense of satisfaction with the equipment which is provided. I know we have had some debate about that but, again, my overwhelming impression is that we have some exceptionally good equipment there, which the troops simply would not and could not do without. They have nothing but praise for the standard of the equipment that they have and are looking forward to the chopper support particularly from the US. As the Dutch have moved out and the US have moved in to support us in Oruzgan, they have been particularly pleased with the US chopper support. The comments made were that if you are going to be supported by anyone in a chopper, the US will go in when no-one else will, so they are the ones that you want on your side particularly if they are picking up someone who is injured. They will go in under fire, under any circumstances, to bring a person out. There have been circumstances where Australians would have lost their lives if not for the support of that particularly extraordinary group of Americans who fly their choppers.

There are many things I would like to say about what I learned, but there are many things I cannot talk about. In fact, even my schedule was confidential and I had to hand it back when I left. So I have had to try and remember the many people I met. Many of my photos were deleted as well, and I cannot even tell you what was in them that caused them to be deleted. There are many things that I simply cannot talk about, so I am just trying to give you the overall impression of it.

It was a delight to meet the Afghans themselves. I have a very large Afghani population in my community. Many are Hazaras but there are also Sunnis and Shiites. I have people representing the whole Afghani population in Parramatta. There are many Hazara refugees who tell me when I meet them that Oruzgan was their homeland. So this place of 40-degree heat and desert, which has wonderful green zones which I was not allowed to go into, was their homeland. When I talk to them I can see that flash of grief and longing in their eyes, because this is a place where they cannot return for the moment.

I said to some of the Afghanis there, 'Tell me what Afghanistan is like when the things that should not be there are not—when there is no opium, no Taliban and no military.' It is an incredible shame that many of them seem to have forgotten. Their lives have been so difficult for so long that that memory of what their country is without these terrible things has faded, and their lives are based on surviving day-to-day. When I get a break in November I am looking forward to sitting down with some of my Hazaras and talking to them about their memory of Oruzgan, which they clearly remember with the greatest affection. What has happened to that country, when you actually go there and see it, is the most extraordinary tragedy. Again, I can only stress that our troops themselves believe that we absolutely should be there.

I am told that the Taliban are one of the worst enemies that we have ever fought. They are unbelievably flexible. They come from a place in a world quite different from ours. In the West, you can choose one path. You can say, 'This is what I am going to do,' and you can go there. In places like Afghanistan only a mad person would choose one path. A sensible person has several options and walks several paths at any time. The Taliban manage to skip from one to another very quickly, which makes them a very flexible enemy which changes its patterns and its shapes as it needs to. There are people who fight with the Taliban who will stop fighting with the Taliban if there are other options. Again, this is because the people themselves will change paths as required. This is not a form of corruption, nor a form of disloyalty. It is a cultural pattern which comes from a country which is so harsh that you cannot survive with one goal; you need several layers at once. I think they are beginning to come to terms with the Western way of thinking in Afghanistan, but it makes for a very interesting place generally. I am running out of time. I would like to keep going, because it is an extraordinary place with extraordinary people, but my time has finished. (*Time expired*)

**Dr WASHER** (Moore) (8.13 pm)—I am one of the few folk here who opposed this war bitterly. Before I talk about that I want to tell you how much I admire our troops. They fight with courage, they fight with honour and they fight with morality. To lose 21 and have 156 wounded—and, being a doctor, I know when they come home how many more will be emotionally injured—is an absolute tragedy. I have heard many people say why we went into the war in 2001. I want everyone to know that I support that reason. But it is now 2010, and you have to ask yourself: why the hell are we still there? I am telling you: it is because we are crazy. The No. 1 reason given is the American alliance, and the No. 2 reason is that we have to look after the population, that we have civil duties and that we have to make sure that al-Qaeda has gone.

Let me tell you the problem. The Dutch have pulled out—they are smart. The Canadians are going to pull out next year. The Americans are reducing their troops next year; so are the British. The Americans now really know they cannot win this war. Obama himself knows that. Vice President Joe Biden acknowledges that this war is unwinnable. McChrystal was removed because he was too light on the civilian population and lost too many American lives. Petraeus has gone in. He is heavier and he will lose fewer American lives, but the collateral damage in killing the civilian population will increase dramatically.

That is all very good—but for what? What do we aim to gain? Let me tell you what we have in the presence on the ground. I will tell you about two people I know who have fought in Afghanistan and today have influence in Afghanistan at a very high level. Before I tell you that, there are a few hundred—I do not know the exact number—SAS special fighters. Some

of them I know. Some of them are friends of my son. They are certainly the friends of the person I am going to talk about. These guys love to go to war. I know them. They love war. This is what we train them to do, and they are damn good at it. I love them. They are warlords. They fight, and they are fighting tough people. But I will come back to that in a second.

The second mob we have are training the 4th Brigade of the Afghan National Army. These are the most hopeless bunch of critters that God ever put on the planet, and I will tell you why: they are not the cream of the population, because those people are already working for the warlords. Every warlord has an army. Every drug dealer has an army. Karzai has armies. His brother is the biggest poppy grower in the whole of Afghanistan. They cut deals to get the poppies out through Nimroz province into Iran to sell to your kids. I would have bought the stuff and turned it into morphine, pethidine or codeine—legitimate drugs. Unfortunately, Karzai and company—the drug lords and the warlords—have got it all tied up. Here we are, teaching the 4th Brigade how to fight. The warlords fought the Soviet army and killed 100,000 of them. What the heck are we deluding ourselves with?

Let me tell you about the two people I know so well. One is an ex-SAS, and I cannot mention his name. I will call him G for the sake of it. He was just recently in Afghanistan and is back now in Australia. He is a special operative who works for himself, so when I tell you the places he has been you do not need to have a war with Pakistan, like Bob Katter suggests. He has been in every province as a special ex-SAS operative now in security technology, from Oruzgan to Kandahar to Helmand to Nimroz, across into Pakistan and up into Waziristan. He cuts deals with different people there to try to save lives. When I rang him last Saturday to get an update on how things are going, he said it is the most futile war he has ever seen. This guy has been in Iraq. If I mention too many places, people might know who he is, so I will not do that. He has been in South America. He has been in literally every war you can imagine. He is a professional fighter. He is a decent guy but a professional fighter. He knows literally every SAS guy on the ground—and they are good.

When he went across to help cut deals in Pakistan, he went there because he went to get the Taliban to go talk to Karzai, who has the most corrupt government on the face of the planet. The Taliban need to be in this government because we need to exit this as soon as possible with some dignity. So we need representation—forget about democracy—on the ground if we are not going to leave a slaughter yard behind. You can stay there for five generations, but the Taliban are not going anywhere. He said to me that when you cross towards those areas where our boys are trying to stop these people building the IEDs that kill so many of us, you see no fathers. You do not see any brothers. It is obvious why not. We have the best professional teams in history in there, but we are not winning hearts and minds. You cannot send any aid people into this country unless they have military protection or they will be dead in 24 hours. They hate you. You are deluding yourself. You are seen as a foreign, occupying army with different ideologies, with Western principles they do not adhere to and with a religion they find infidel and repugnant. They already have plenty of armies. What are we training armies for? As I said, we could get a couple of warlords who would knock up a better army.

To give you an idea, the last time my friend was there they were teaching them how to use rocket propelled grenades, which are pretty dangerous things. So what did they do? They shot one straight up in the air. It came straight down and killed 30. That is not unusual. When they send them out in the battlefield they generally shoot one another more than they do the enemy.

It is because the warlords would have picked them up if they were any good. The drug lords would have picked them up if they were any good. These are what is left over, and most of them desert. The tragedy is that when you send the money in it goes through Karzai and the boys, and the warlords pick up all the Western money. As you have heard, they are getting it out of Iran as well. They are taking it in cash. But these guys on the ground are not getting paid. That is another problem. So they desert.

We are fighting al-Qaeda, but al-Qaeda is an ideology. You cannot stop an ideology by putting guards on a border. That is crazy. G tells me the ASIO blokes over here understand fully. Our threat is not al-Qaeda ideology coming back into Afghanistan; our threat is probably home grown—right here. So the fight against this so-called ideology is not going to be won with guns and border protection; it is going to be by being very careful with what we have back home.

Now I want to tell you about a Taliban fighter who used to work for me for a little while. You should go have a look at some of his work. He sculpted a big eagle for me—a giant eagle for Aquila—because I was a megalomaniac and owned wineries before I learnt how much money you lose! He did a beautiful job. He also carved Joseph in jarrah for the Catholic cathedral. His name is Mehdi Mohammadi. He has gone back to Kabul in Afghanistan for a short time. They tend to grab his brother every time he goes there and take a lot of money from him, because it is all corrupt. But that is life.

How he started as a sculptor and a painter—as are other members of his family—is that his uncle and his cousin made a beautiful sculpture of a human being. The Taliban caught them and had a problem with that so they killed his uncle and his cousin. He was conscripted—and conscription there is not waiting for your marble or ball to be picked; it is being told, ‘We’re going to shoot you if you don’t cooperate’. He was probably lucky because he was wounded within a year or so of that and they left him in a cave to die. He was one of the guys who got out of Afghanistan as a boatperson, an asylum seeker, came to this country and survived—with a bit of scarring. He is now an Australian citizen and you can look at his works, as I said. He has changed his name to Medhi Rasulle.

He has told me of the lunacy of what we are doing there. He is about as religious as I am. He is an incredible guy—he had no English when he came to this country but in a short time he could speak fluent English. He is an absolute genius when it comes to sculpting. However, Afghanistan is a land of tribes—it is not a country where people are identified as Afghans although they might call themselves that. It is a land of tribes ruled by tribal warlords, some of them drug dealers and some of them Taliban or whatever you want to call them. We chase them to Pakistan and they come back.

We all know this war is lost, except for the people who have never been there. G knows it is lost. Mehdi knows it is lost. What we need is to get some government that is not a democratic government but that is representative of the tribes, the warlords and all the others there so there will be some stability when we leave. When should we leave? If we cannot do that in six months I think we are wasting our time. Forget the 4th Brigade—they have enough warlords and armies to take on whatever they want, but they just do not have the will to fight. If they do not want to fight for us then let us get our people home.

I turn now to the American alliance. I suggest my American friends pull their troops out as soon as possible, as soon as we can establish that. They are already getting NATO to fly peo-

ple out of Pakistan—that is, the Taliban top leaders. Inter-Services Intelligence or ISI, an organisation of masterminds in Pakistan, felt some threats and caught some of the more rational of them—they are not all raving lunatics; there are a lot who are, but not all. They arrested them in Pakistan to stop them cooperating and coming back to form a government with Karzai because Pakistan has some interest in what happens in Afghanistan, as do Iran and the central Asian republics. That is a tragedy and every day we leave it we are going to lose more people in a pointless war that has to be sorted out by a different form of government to what we have now, remembering it is going to be corrupt and it is going to have warlords. It has plenty of armies and it has plenty of police forces. The ones we are training are not good quality and I can assure you they will be working for the Taliban, the local drug lord or the local warlord because that is where the money is. All the money that we have sent gets siphoned off to those guys, not to the guys we are training.

So let us get the heck out of there, let us get sensible and let us listen to people who have been to all the southern provinces recently because they are realistic guys. They know about war and they know how to win or lose battles. Let us come home and try not to leave a blood-bath behind. Let us get whatever sort of government we can and let us go back and deal with them.

**Mr HAYES** (Fowler) (8.26 pm)—I am very pleased to have the opportunity to address the House and share my thoughts on the current International Security Assistance Force mission in Afghanistan. In April this year I had the unique opportunity of participating in a Defence Force program. Along with a small group of my fellow parliamentarians from both sides of the House, I spent eight days in the Middle East at a joint service facility at Al Minhad, which is a staging ground for many of those who are going on to serve our country in Afghanistan. We had the opportunity to spend time with the men and women of the Australian Defence Force, from the newest member on deployment to Australia's head of the Middle East operations, Major General John Cantwell. You cannot help but be touched by their professionalism, their dedication to duty and their commitment to our nation's objectives in that region.

During this parliamentary debate, our thoughts and our prayers must be with the families and friends of the 21 Australian soldiers who have lost their lives thus far in Afghanistan. I think we owe it to all those men who have made the ultimate sacrifice to make a real contribution to this debate. Their deaths are a sobering reminder of just how difficult and dangerous life is in Afghanistan and why this conflict should be in the forefront of our thinking. Our servicemen and women deserve our full support.

It is well known that in 2001 Australia decided to support the United States and Operation Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan as a part of its war on terror. Our role as part of the alliance objectives was to ensure that Afghanistan was not a safe place for terrorists. However, given Australia's role as part of the coalition of the willing and commitments to the invasion of Iraq, Australia drew down on our forces in Afghanistan in 2002 to assist our efforts in that theatre.

Over the ensuing period between our deployments, significant changes occurred. Given the nature of the foreign insurgency in Afghanistan—and now with almost clearly definable supply routes into and out of Pakistan which is somewhat evidenced by the frequency of the US air strikes in that region—one could conclude that Afghanistan is at present not being used as a training ground for al-Qaeda or indeed a safe haven for terrorists. Clearly no-one would want to have that accomplishment reversed. In response to these developments, in 2006 Aus-

tralia's role in Afghanistan changed from predominantly a combat role to a much larger reconstruction effort in Oruzgan province. In 2008 our focus shifted again and the Defence Force took on a more mentoring role for the Afghan National Army as well as local law enforcement.

Regardless of the original reason for entering the conflict in 2001, which was to support the US led effort to help deny sanctuary to terrorists, I am fully supportive of Australia's current role in helping to restore stability for the Afghan people. These people live under threats from many quarters. The ones we typically focus on come from the Taliban and their allies, but many Afghans suffer equally from predatory police and corrupt officials—regrettably, people we regard as our allies. It is unlikely that there will ever be a 'mission accomplished' pronouncement in this particular theatre, but I think the Australian people are entitled to know what degree of success would warrant a draw-down of Australian assistance—in other words, what would determine an Australian exit strategy. I believe that a premature withdrawal would hasten the overall breakdown of stability in Afghanistan, be completely unacceptable to our allies and would waste the investment already made.

Clearly, complete withdrawal is some time off, but in the meanwhile, if we are to be successful in Afghanistan, we and our alliance partners must be making it abundantly clear to the Afghan government that we expect them to step up to the plate and make significant efforts in respect of good governance in their country. Unless we have substantial improvement in policing and law enforcement, for instance, it is hard to see how the situation in Afghanistan will change once Australia and the other alliance partners withdraw. While terrorism may be denied a revival, I genuinely fear what might develop in its place. For starters, Afghanistan is currently the world's largest producer of opium for the heroin trade. Last year I was a member of a parliamentary delegation reviewing serious and organised crime. We met with the principal officers of leading law enforcement agencies, including the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime and Europol. Both of these agencies advised us in no uncertain terms that Afghanistan is still the key source country, producing around 900 tonnes of heroin per year, or 92 per cent of global production.

It has been said many times in this place that the purpose of our involvement in Afghanistan is to provide a stable and secure environment for its people. If we are serious about meeting that objective, we need to work with the Afghan forces to counter the export of illicit drugs, which now involves various international organised crime syndicates. While 92 per cent of the world's opium comes out of Afghanistan, less than two per cent is seized there. This is a clear incentive for organised crime to invest in that region as there are huge profit margins to be exploited. I know there is much debate about the crop and its value to the local community, but I seriously question our practice of trying to intercept drugs once they have left Afghanistan. It is essential that part of our security strategy be addressing this problem in country.

Besides the terrible social, economic and personal effect that heroin has on society, the drug trade in Afghanistan has severe consequences on what Australia and its allies are trying to achieve in that region. In 2009 the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime released a report entitled *Addiction, crime and insurgency: the transnational threat of Afghan opium*. In that report, the Executive Director of UNODC, Antonio Maria Costa, noted:

It has become difficult to distinguish clearly between terrorist movements, insurgencies and organized crime ... since their tactics and funding sources are increasingly similar.

It can now be said that all actors involved in destabilizing Afghanistan are directly or indirectly linked to the drug economy. Insurgents' access to the opium economy translates into increased military capabilities and prolongs conflict. Opiates also fuel insecurity across Afghanistan as groups fight for control of routes and territory.

According to that report, between 2005 and 2008 the Taliban made \$450 million to \$600 million in total just from taxing opium cultivation and trade in Afghanistan. The link between organised crime and terrorist insurgency is now absolutely beyond doubt. To target one without the other simply does not make any sense at all. How can we have our soldiers patrol through the poppy fields in Oruzgan, or other areas, knowing full well that that crop is destined for the illicit drug trade, which in turn is going to be used to fund insurgent terrorist efforts against our troops, our objectives and the future security of the Afghan nation? Indeed, in the West we should ask: how long can parents be expected to support a war in Afghanistan if their sons and daughters are dying at the end of a needle? Clearly we must develop and implement better measures to prevent a community reliance on the illicit drug trade which acts to undermine any attempt to institute good governance in Afghanistan.

Besides our commitment to train and mentor the entire 4th Brigade of the Afghan National Army, we currently have 28 Australian Federal Police officers in Afghanistan to help train and mentor officers of the Afghan National Police. In Afghanistan, police are in a far more precarious position than the military. For every Army casualty, there are five police deaths. It is an extraordinary statistic. The AFP's work is important and it deserves our full support, but in truth it is only scratching the surface in a corruption-ridden country. The AFP's job is particularly difficult given the low literacy and education levels and the fact that corruption is widespread, not just in the police. According to the latest survey produced by Integrity Watch Afghanistan, earlier this year, corruption is rampant and has become more entrenched in all areas of Afghan life. This report is a damning critique when the citizens of Afghanistan regard their police and judiciary as the most corrupt of the country's institutions. That is a powerful reason why people might be tempted to turn back to the Taliban—simply for justice. The entrenched corruption within law enforcement agencies certainly derails the fundamental gains Afghanistan has achieved since the end of 2001.

Unless great inroads are made by the Afghan government to effect anticorruption measures, the mentoring and training AFP officers are providing presently will probably be wasted. Australia and its alliance forces may well find themselves defeating the insurgents; however, if corruption continues to flourish within the police and the broader justice sector, we will not be successful in our objective of advancing the security and wellbeing of the Afghan people. Replacing the tyranny of an ideologically driven Taliban by profit driven criminals may be of little consequence for the ordinary folk who want a future for themselves and their families.

In closing, I support Australia's objectives in Afghanistan to deny sanctuary to the terrorists and to work towards stabilising the country for the benefit of its people. I recognise and pay tribute to the 2,104 allied soldiers, including 21 Australians, who have given their lives serving the objectives of the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan. As well, I recognise the 40,000 innocent Afghan men, women and children who have died during this conflict. We owe it to them to at least be true to our objectives. However, I cannot see how we

can fully achieve our objectives if there is to be a reliance on a burgeoning illicit drug trade in Afghanistan which sustains both organised crime and terrorist insurgency. If we genuinely care for the people of Afghanistan, attacking corruption and promoting good governance within our sphere of influence is just as important as our stated military objectives.

**Mrs PRENTICE** (Ryan) (8.39 pm)—There is nothing nice about war. In this particular case, there is nothing nice for Afghanistan and nothing nice for Australia. Going to war is never a step taken lightly by any responsible government, but in our imperfect world there are times when that is what nations must do for just and honourable reasons. That is the case in Afghanistan. Through our elected government, we as a nation made a decision in 2001 that we must go to war in Afghanistan. We are still there. Our role has changed but, importantly, it has enjoyed bipartisan support. Now, in this parliament, members and senators have an opportunity and an obligation. They have an opportunity to express a point of view and an obligation to construct a debate that taken together inform and educate Australians as to our role and our objectives and allows them to make an informed judgment on this costly commitment. It is costly financially but, most importantly, it is costly in terms of lives and the injuries—physical and mental—to so many young, serving Australians. Over the years, we have seen success in effectively defeating al-Qaeda in Afghanistan and have moved on to a role of mentoring, training and partnering Afghani troops on operations.

I have listened carefully as this debate has progressed. I do not intend today to repeat many of the arguments that have been put so eloquently by other speakers in this debate. But in order to assess our role we must look at where Afghanistan stands today. As we do so, it becomes clear that there are other nations which exhibit the very problems that we find in Afghanistan—or worse. As we look at the Horn of Africa we can see failed states exhibiting little or no rule of law often used and manipulated by international criminal organisations or used as havens for terrorist training and operations. This raises a question in some minds. If we are not prepared to commit troops on every occasion where these circumstances exist, why should we stay in Afghanistan?

There is a lot to trouble us about today's Afghanistan—the fact that the government does not control large parts of the country; the clear suggestions of corruption within the Afghan government; the religious extremism of the Taliban, and the acceptance of it by those who work with them; and the sheer scale of opium production and the link between heroin and the Taliban. Each of these matters could on their own encourage some form of intervention—civil or military, as the case may be. But the question of when a nation-state should interfere in the government and politics of a sovereign nation-state and even consider military action is a vexed one and, for the purposes of this debate, may be the wrong question. Why? Because we are already there. This debate serves little purpose if it is merely to be a retrospective or an exercise in comparative decision making. We must not forget that the original commitment to this war enjoyed almost universal support at home and internationally under United Nations mandate with resolution No. 1386.

So where are we today? As the Leader of the Opposition said in his contribution to this debate, our objective is to allow Afghans to choose what they think is right for them. We are doing that through a quite specific role, assisting in developing the Afghan National Army through embedded partnering. As one soldier said to me, 'That means a combination of training and significantly partnering, going into battle with our Afghan colleagues and learning to

trust each other.' That is quite different from just training or just fighting. In the civil aid sphere there has been an ongoing debate as to the extent to which advisers should just advise or train by example, by working side by side with those they wish to train. I am told that partnering—living, working and fighting side by side, Australians together with the 4th Brigade of the Afghan National Army—is showing results. In the long term, that will result in an Afghani brigade with an Australian ethos. Our legacy to the 4th Brigade will be Australian military culture based on teamwork, courage and a shared version of Australia's great quality of mateship.

I am told that our troops have a real respect for these Afghan soldiers. They are genuinely fighting for their nation's survival and their families' future, notwithstanding the threats and reprisals. We encourage these soldiers to come and train side by side with our dedicated officers and soldiers. We cannot train them without standing side by side with them in training and in battle. By doing this we earn their trust. We cannot abandon them now. So, by our intervention, we have started a process that has encouraged Afghans to take a stand against terrorism and against corruption. The signs are positive but we must stay the course.

The member for Bowman, speaking from his personal experience, spoke movingly of the hope that our presence provides. It is a hope built on a desire for a society where people have a say in how they live their lives, where women might be educated, where peace and security might prevail. This does not mean that we should seek to replicate Australian society in this country. To do so would be the height of arrogance. We are fighting to create the environment to let the Afghan people decide. If that is to happen, our role is to help them gain the capacity to provide security, to help them build the environment that allows people a say, not just the warlords. But that will not be easy. We should never understate that challenge or its difficulty. Equally, a democratically elected government in a safe and secure Afghanistan will often make decisions with which we will strongly disagree. Corruption will exist, but if through our police assistance we can help in that regard, so much the better. However, the acknowledgement by President Karzai of cash payments to his office from Iran raises most serious concerns. We should not ignore it, but our role is to help build the capacity to deal with it. We are doing that through the presence of the Australian Federal Police, with a particular emphasis on Oruzgan. Slowly but surely we can help Afghanistan build a better future.

Finally, I come back to the question of heroin production in Afghanistan. That heroin is a curse on our society is an understatement. According to the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, opium production in Afghanistan in 2010 covered some 123,000 hectares. Ninety-six per cent of that production took place in the southern and western regions, including Oruzgan province, where our troops are today. Eradication programs have not worked and there is a clear link between lack of security and opium cultivation. The UN points out that gross income from opium per hectare outstrips wheat by a ratio of six to one—US\$4,900 to US\$770 per hectare.

As reported in the *Australian* in an article by Sally Neighbour on 21 May, the US State Department's narcotics control strategy report, released in March, refers to the symbiotic relationship between the insurgency and narcotics trafficking. This presents a serious challenge, but to simply destroy crops without providing an alternative economic solution has to date been clearly unsuccessful. The provision of support for alternative crops and the provision of microfinance and venture capital will all play a role in eradicating this scourge. It is arguable

from the UN report that a secure and stable environment will provide the biggest factor in this process. It is encouraging to note that it also showed that the two major reasons for never cultivating opium or stopping cultivation are that it is banned by government or that it is against Islam.

As I traverse this difficult and troubling debate, I readily acknowledge the difficult nature of the discussion. It is not easy and it will not get easier. More fine, brave Australians will almost inevitably lose their lives. I have seen the anguish and despair on the faces of the families of those who have already lost their lives. Those tears and that pain must never leave our minds as we discuss this issue. But, as so many family members have said, 'Do not let their sacrifice be in vain.' So I must clearly state that I support our ongoing commitment to Afghanistan. I do so in the strong view that we must stay the course. But that does not mean that, in deciding to fight on, we should ignore discussion and diplomacy. I noted the comments of the member for Lyne and the member for Bowman and, indeed, the former Minister for Foreign Affairs, Alexander Downer, about the need to engage the Taliban.

In Europe we see the emergence of the hard fascist and racist right. They stand for election and win seats. They are not banned. That does not mean that their views are correct. In his article, Alexander Downer referred to the Bougainville conflict and the necessity of engaging with the Bougainville Revolutionary Army and including them in the political process. I have met a number of the BRA and rebel government leaders. My husband acted for them in the Bougainville peace process—a working example of, as many have put it, finding peace by peaceful means. So I agree with the former foreign minister. As we hold our course, as we help Afghanistan build its military and civil capacity, as our troops wage war, we should be open to diplomacy and political negotiations—not at any price, not at cost to those Afghans who share our commitment to democracy—and willing to talk.

As I said in my maiden speech:

Sadly the remoteness of this war and the 15-second-grab nature of television news mean that many Australians do not see that reality, do not see the pain and suffering.

They see war by television, close enough to touch yet far enough away that it is just not seen. Hopefully this debate will shine some light on the hard decisions that must be made in our far from perfect world.

Let me finish as I started. War is a terrible thing. There is nothing nice about it. There is pain and grief on all sides, particularly for the civilian population. So I must again pay tribute to our troops: 6RAR battle group for the work well done and 5RAR battle group for the work they will undertake. Equally I must pay tribute to our Australian Federal Police, DFAT staff and aid workers—all brave Australians who are all too often overlooked as their courageous work is unseen. As a nation we will, we must, stand behind you as you carry the responsibility for our decisions and as you confront the often tragic results of war. To go to this war is not your decision—it is your nation's, and you go without complaint. You go to war, to this most dangerous place, for your country. I salute you and I thank you.

**Mr KELVIN THOMSON** (Wills) (8.52 pm)—I acknowledge and congratulate the Greens for their role in initiating this debate on Afghanistan, which I believe is serving an important national objective. It is focusing media and public attention on Australia's role in Afghanistan: why are we there, what are we seeking to achieve and how long are we going to be there? These things ought to be debated, and the nation is richer for this debate. Indeed, it is my view

that we should not send troops overseas to war without parliamentary authority or approval. We should amend the Defence Act to require parliamentary approval for the sending of Australian soldiers to war overseas other than in the event of a direct attack on Australia. This parliamentary scrutiny would oblige the executive to provide hard evidence of the threat to Australia, taking us beyond slogans and rhetoric and greatly reducing the chances of another debacle like Iraq. Given the usual complexion of the Senate, this would generally mean the government of the day would have to secure the agreement of one or other non-government political parties to pass its motion. This is as it should be. Going to war is a major matter. It should be a matter of bipartisan, or preferably multipartisan, commitment.

I have reached this conclusion because of my strong aversion to violence. I believe that attacking others can only be justified in self-defence, either because others have attacked you or are about to. It is a basic legal concept and it holds true for relations between countries just as much as it does for relations between human beings.

Let me make it clear at once that I do not have any difficulty with the United States response post September 11, 2001 in Afghanistan. It was clear that the organisers of the September 11 attacks were in Afghanistan and the Taliban regime in Afghanistan refused to do anything to capture them or to hand them over. It gave every impression of being in league with them. It was reasonable for the United States to conclude that if it did not take action in Afghanistan it would be subjected to further attacks. But if an attack has not yet taken place, who decides whether a threat is real and whether the doctrine of self-defence can be justified? Parliament should decide. Safety in numbers—'In the multitude of councillors there is wisdom'.

Now we are in Afghanistan. What now? There is no getting around just what a tough issue this is. I read over the last weekend some of the comments from family members of some of our soldiers who have been killed in Afghanistan—young lives cut short in outrageously abrupt and barbaric ways. Some family members strongly believe Australia must stay on in Afghanistan. One said:

I would feel that it was a waste of our son's life if we pulled out. If you're going in you need to see it through. I think our boys are making a difference and if the politicians all work together this can happen.

Another said:

To just pull out and say it's your problem, you handle it, I just think exposes a vulnerable population to the Taliban. Those who have died trying to support an initiative would have died in vain.

Powerful arguments indeed, delivered with the unique credibility and authority which attaches to a suffering loved one. But then there are family members who say this:

I think the best thing they could do is pull our boys out and let them go home to their families. How many people have got to die before you say it's not in vain?

Or this:

It's a bloody waste of time and effort. My personal thinking is call it quits and come home ... I would hate to see any more of our soldiers being killed.

There are clearly very powerful arguments both ways. How did we get into such a difficult situation? Australia's commitment began in October 2001, the month after the terrorist attack on New York's Twin Towers. But the initial success of the mission in Afghanistan in over-

throwing the Taliban and its repulsive leader, Mullah Omar, gave way to inattention. I try hard these days to avoid the sins of political partisanship and to assess the merits of ideas and policies without regard to their origin. But it is hard to look at where we are in Afghanistan without coming to the conclusion that this mission was done grave, perhaps irreparable, damage by former US President George W Bush and his Republican administration. They shifted the focus from Afghanistan to Iraq. This was a terrible mistake. It detracted from the critically important struggle to capture al-Qaeda leaders.

Furthermore, one of the major reasons for the failure of nation building in Afghanistan and Pakistan was the failure to deal with the issue of drugs. Developing alternative crops and livelihoods was never a serious part of US policy, and debate circled around aerial or ground eradication. In those critical days in 2003, a few thousand more US troops on the ground, more money for reconstruction and a speedier rebuilding of the Afghan army and police may well have turned the tide against the Taliban and enhanced support of the population for the government. Afghan leaders ruefully suggested that the war in Iraq might have diverted US resources away from Afghanistan, but the George W Bush administration ignored their pleas.

When the commander of United States and international troops in Afghanistan, David Petraeus, took over in June, he said:

I don't think that anyone is under any illusion that we're going to turn Afghanistan into Switzerland in five years.

That is fair enough, but the fact is that during the critical years post the overthrow of the Taliban no serious effort was made to turn Afghanistan into a Switzerland. The Taliban was allowed back into the equation and local people became uncertain as to how serious the United States and Western nations were. And the views of the locals are critical in this matter. Local attitudes can be difficult to accurately assess. It has been reported that soldiers are welcomed to a village during the day and praised for their efforts in Afghanistan, only to hear of the same village giving help to Taliban fighters under cover of dark. This might smack of opportunism on the part of Afghan people, but the truth is would we or anyone else be any different given the same circumstances? After all, the penalties for being on the losing side in Afghanistan are savage and extreme. Who can really blame them for having two-bob each way.

The war is now in its deadliest year. Over 580 of the US led International Security Assistance Force have been killed this year. Over 150,000 foreign troops under US and NATO command are fighting a Taliban insurgency that has steadily expanded. I have seen countries bogged down in unwinnable wars before. It happened to the US and us in Vietnam and it happened to the US and us again in Iraq. Indeed, it happened in Afghanistan before, to the Russians. I have come to the conclusion that this war is unwinnable from my own observation of the conflict over nine years now—longer than the Second World War—and I do not want us to go down the failed roads of Vietnam and Iraq. I have also come to this conclusion from reading the work of senior military experts. Major-General Alan Stretton served in World War II, Korea and Malaya, and in Vietnam, where he was the Australia chief of staff in 1969 and 1970. He says the Afghan population 'now sees the war as a foreign invasion of its country'.

Similarly, Brigadier Mark Smethurst, one of Australia's top combat soldiers, has stated that the Taliban tactics have 'overwhelmed' the coalition and they 'cannot be defeated by military means'. He says that we cannot afford to give the Taliban a boost in nuclear armed Pakistan, and I absolutely agree that our strategy in the region must be very much geared to stopping

Pakistan falling into the hands of fundamentalists. But in a reflection of the complexity of the politics of the region, Australian National University Professor Amin Saikal has said that Pakistanis are actually backing the Taliban in Afghanistan. Professor Saikal says the US should take the lead in an international conference under US auspices to find a regional consensus on Afghanistan amongst its neighbours. He says that so far no-one has done that. Professor Saikal also observes that the strong presidential system put in place in Kabul must be changed because Afghanistan is too socially divided to make the strong presidential system work.

I believe we need a clear exit strategy from Afghanistan. I agree with former Australian Defence Force chief Peter Gration, who has stated that Australian troops in Afghanistan need an exit strategy based on clear and measurable objectives. General Gration commanded the Australian Defence Force from 1987 to 1993. He said:

Having come this far, we cannot unilaterally walk away, but we should not consider having an open-ended commitment there ...

We've got to have an exit strategy based on a series of measurable outcomes.

He said this could include some clearer benchmarks in areas such as the security situation in Uruzgan, the self-sufficiency of local government, the strength of the economy and the effectiveness of the Afghan army and security forces.

Let me make it clear that in advocating an exit strategy I am not advocating a unilateral withdrawal. I am advocating that we develop an exit strategy in concert with the United States and the other participants in the International Security Assistance Force. I am a firm supporter of the defence alliance with the United States. Moreover, I do not see any reason why consideration for the views of others need act as a barrier to an exit strategy. US President Barack Obama wants American troops to start withdrawing from next July. The Afghanistan conference recently held in Kabul set a timetable for a transition of security arrangements to Afghan authorities by 2014. While that seems to me to be a long way away, and I would like to see a more rapid time frame adopted, the direction is clear. International forces in Afghanistan do not aspire to be there indefinitely, and neither should we. Surely Afghanistan is not some kind of Hotel California where you can check out any time you like but you can never leave. Surely there is an end point beyond which we are not required to continue risking young Australian lives.

Let me turn to two other relevant issues. Clearly our presence in Afghanistan is all about making Australia and the rest of the world safe and secure from terrorist attacks carried out by religious extremists. It seems obvious to me that a clear stumbling block to building a world safe from such attacks is the intransigence of the Iranian regime and its outrageous leader, Mahmoud Ahmadinejad. Just a few weeks ago Mr Ahmadinejad made bizarre allegations, unsupported by a shred of evidence, that the United States was itself behind the 11 September 2001 attacks. The Iranian regime has a dreadful track record of suppression of women and of human rights, of looking to develop nuclear weapons and of supporting terrorist groups abroad. I do not think that we should attack the Iranian regime; surely this is the lesson of Vietnam and Iraq. But I do not think we should be supporting it either, and yet this is what we and the United States have been doing by outlawing and branding as terrorists a key Iranian opposition group—the PMOI, known in Iran as the Mujaheddin-e-Khalq, or MEK. The Ira-

nian opposition should receive our support and the terrorist listing, which has been withdrawn in England and in Europe, should be withdrawn here.

I also want to make some remarks about Australia's system of military justice. It has been the subject of some public debate recently, with a number of Australian soldiers facing charges following civilian deaths in Afghanistan. There are two kinds of people in the world: there are people who were there and people who were not. Those who were not present have no knowledge of it and would do well to express no views about the guilt or innocence of those whose conduct is now in question. I saw an opinion poll which asked whether Australian soldiers should ever be prosecuted over the deaths of civilians in Afghanistan. I was surprised that the question was asked and even more surprised that the majority of my fellow Australian citizens said no. I am compelled to contest this answer most vigorously. It was established by the Nuremberg war crimes tribunals, after all the brutality and atrocities of the Second World War, which so debased humanity, that war is not a place where anything goes, where civilians are fair game. For example, if army tanks rolled into a city and troops from the safety of that tank were to shoot dead a small unarmed girl standing quietly by the roadside, surely this would be a war crime. Surely it would not matter what the nationality of the troops or that of the small girl was. So I urge all concerned to let the military justice system do its work without hindrance or gratuitous advice. There is no reason to date for a want of confidence in its capacity to arrive at just decisions and outcomes.

Finally, let me express my personal thanks and those of my electorate for the heroism of our soldiers in what we all know are dreadful circumstances. Their bravery and courage, their hardship and privations, are hard for us to comprehend and certainly impossible for us to properly repay. But we sleep better at night for their willingness to defend us and they are often in our thoughts.

**Mr BALDWIN** (Paterson) (9.07 pm)—I rise to speak tonight to speak on Australia's role in Afghanistan and, most importantly, to give my unequivocal support to Australia's role in Afghanistan and to pay tribute to the amazing work being done by our very brave soldiers. I start by saying that I am neither a hawk nor a dove. I do not favour war as the only means to bring about a result, nor do I think it morally wrong to fight another for what you truly believe in. I do believe that, after taking expert advice and evaluating all options, once the decision is made to act it needs to be with the full force available, in particular to mitigate collateral damage and bring about as rapid a solution as possible. Most importantly, I do believe in staying the course and completing the job you set out to do. I would never support cutting and running. The price that has been paid in Australian lives alone is just too great to do that.

My ongoing support for Australia's involvement in Afghanistan is based primarily on four things. It is based, first, on expert advice and briefings provided to me in my former role as shadow minister for defence science and personnel and assisting the shadow minister for defence on our role and the outcomes being achieved; secondly, on those fine men and women I have met while visiting Australian defence forces in Tarin Kowt, Kandahar and at Al Minhad air base; thirdly, on the many discussions I have had with my own constituents who serve the nation at RAAF Base Williamtown and the families who have been left behind as our men and women deploy onto active service; and, fourth, on my belief that we are blessed with a magnificent freedom and democracy that others should be able to enjoy.

In Australia, we take for granted our peace. Our children do not know what it is like to grow up in civil war, under a dictatorship or with the threat of a regime which crushes personal freedoms and expression. For that, we are extremely blessed. However, I support our involvement in Afghanistan also because we do not and cannot fully understand the oppression of others. The war in Afghanistan is not a war to be won quickly or easily. This is not a war of sovereign states versus sovereign state. This is not a war fought against an opponent who abides by the Geneva convention. This is a war against insurgents who know no rules. This is a war against opponents who are willing to sacrifice civilians and children in order to protect themselves. This is a war to say no to terrorism and yes to the freedoms and democracy we know as Australians.

My children probably would not remember where they were on 11 September 2001, as they were only nine and 10 years of age at the time. However, September 11 was when the innocent were lost and when terrorism first became known to many. September 11, 2001 is a day that will live in infamy for all decent citizens of the world. The images that flashed across our screens were almost unbelievable. It was impossible to imagine the kind of evil that could conceive such a plan. Fifteen Australians were amongst the almost 3,000 people who were killed that day. Sadly, many nations were personally touched by this reprehensible act of cowardice. On that day, President Bush spoke to his people and to the rest of the world and said:

America and our friends and allies join with all those who want peace and security in the world, and we stand together to win the war against terrorism. Tonight, I ask for your prayers for all those who grieve, for the children whose worlds have been shattered, for all whose sense of safety and security has been threatened.

Although 11 September 2001 was a day of unspeakable sadness, it also managed to deliver the very best facets of human spirit. I remember well the grief and anger of Australians, a grief and anger that quickly morphed into a resolve and a commitment to ensure that it never happened again. Beyond our nation, the world stood as one and said 'Never again'. Now, more than ever, we must remember those words 'Never again'.

Just a year later, on 12 October 2002, 88 more Australians lost their lives in the first Bali bombings. Once again, we were reminded that the cost of inaction is greater than the cost of action. Once again, we were reminded that there is a price for peace. The difficulty in measuring the success of this deployment to Afghanistan is the fact that success is gauged by a lack of terrorist events. There is no tangible measure of success. The difficulty in recognising and, therefore, acknowledging the success of our deployment should not detract from our resolve.

The fact that al-Qaeda has been unable to make repeat attacks on the scale of 9-11, Bali or the London bombings proves that it has been contained. Its leadership has been splintered and dispersed. Its ability to organise acts of terror has been nullified by virtue of the coalition's presence in the region. To withdraw now would be to ensure that the nurseries and incubators of terrorism would once again be open for business. Furthermore, to withdraw now would be to return Afghanistan and its people to suffer alone under the Taliban. And, importantly, the sacrifice of 21 Australians would have been in vain. That is why I will never cut and run with my support for my people.

The troops themselves are the most worthy of consultation in this debate. Not only have I spoken broadly to our troops across the nation as I visited their bases or as I went on military training programs with them but I was fortunate enough to spend a week with them in Tarin

Kowt, Kandahar and Al Minhad as part of the ADF parliamentary exchange program. I met with Australian Defence Force personnel, Australian Defence civilians and civilians who have joined the effort in Afghanistan. I listened to them speak firsthand about the pride they have in their achievements and the importance of their work. Their focus is on three things: training and mentoring the Afghan National Army in Oruzgan, strengthening the Afghan National Police and conducting operations to disrupt insurgent operations and supply routes. I quite often shared a brew at Poppy's in Camp Holland while I listened to the troops speak with pride about the work they do and the real differences they make, which gave me an understanding that I could comprehend.

They know that they have contributed to the progress in Afghanistan's development over the past nine years, which has seen a dramatic increase in school enrolments, from around one million in 2001, none of whom were girls, to over six million today, one-third of whom are girls, and a significant increase in the availability of basic health services, which were available to less than 10 per cent of the population under the former Taliban regime but are now extended to around 85 per cent of the people.

Our troops have contributed to the identification and management of over 39,000 community based infrastructure projects, such as wells, clinics, roads and schools, in over 22,000 communities throughout Afghanistan through the Afghanistan led Afghan National Solidarity Program, and to the rehabilitation of over 10,000 kilometres of rural roads, supporting the employment of hundreds of thousands of local workers through the National Rural Access Program.

We have helped to install democracy, which has seen two elections for the lower house of the parliament since 2001—and, importantly, around 27 per cent of the seats in the lower house, and one-sixth of the seats in the upper house, are reserved for female members. It is a democracy with significant powers, including the right to reject or approve draft laws, to hold votes of no confidence in a government minister and reject cabinet nominees.

The Afghans now have a freedom of the press. People have access to over 400 print media publications, 150 FM radio stations and 26 television channels. They have a freedom to discuss publicly issues that were previously off limits, such as human rights abuses and women's rights.

I would like to personally thank Major Jason Eltham for being our escort officer and providing such a strong insight into the operations of the battlefield. This week I have in the chamber in parliament, as a part of the Australian Defence Force Exchange Program, Captain Steven Towner from the 9th Force Support Unit. He, like many of his mates, saw action in Iraq, and we have discussed unabashed all aspects of service life.

I have also attended the funerals and ramp ceremonies. I have heard firsthand the pleas from families about the importance of honouring the legacy of these brave men by continuing to support their comrades in the work they do towards a free and democratic Afghanistan. I have met some of those men who have lost their lives. I have sat with their families and their friends at funerals. My opinions are therefore based not only on some moral conviction of right or wrong but also on real people.

The very nature of war is struggle, and a war is never going to be simple. It is never going to be innocent; it is never going to be black or white. This war is not just about establishing

democracy in Afghanistan. It is about training Afghan security forces to take control of their own country. It is about closing a terrorist breeding ground. It is about sending a message to terrorists that they are not welcome in this country. Prevention is better than cure. A free and democratic Afghanistan is the means by which a rattled but determined and cunning enemy is prevented from starting its rebuilding process. As Major General John Cantwell said recently:

It's not the time to get the wobbles, it's not the time to lose faith, it's not the time to forsake the loss and the sacrifice and expense and the heartache that's gone into Afghanistan.

Sadly, injury and loss of life is a part of war, and significant sacrifices have been made. In total, more than 150 Australian soldiers have been wounded since Operation Slipper began, and tragically 21 have been killed in action. We need to remember all of them.

We need to remember their sacrifices: Special Air Service Regiment Sergeant Andrew Russell, a victim of mine detonation in the southern province of Kandahar, killed in action, 16 February 2002; Trooper David 'Poppy' Pearce, killed when his ASLAV was struck by an improvised explosive device, 9 October 2007; Sergeant Mathew Locke, from the Special Air Service Regiment, killed by Taliban small arms fire, 25 October 2007; Private Luke Worsley, from 4RAR commando unit, killed in battle with Taliban fighters in Oruzgan province on 23 November 2007; Lance Corporal Jason Marks, 4RAR commando unit, killed in a battle with Taliban fighters in Oruzgan province on 27 April 2008; Signaller Sean McCarthy, from the Special Air Service Regiment, killed after being wounded by an improvised explosive device, 8 July 2008; Lieutenant Michael Fussell, from the 4th Battalion of the Royal Australian Regiment, killed by an improvised explosive device in Oruzgan province on 27 November 2008; Private Gregory Michael Sher, from the 1st Commando Regiment, killed as a result of an indirect rocket attack in Oruzgan province, 4 January 2009; Corporal Mathew Hopkins, a member of the Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force, killed in a fire fight with the Taliban near Tarin Kowt, 16 March 2009; Sergeant Brett Till, from the Incident Response Regiment, killed while trying to defuse an improvised explosive device on 19 March 2009; Private Benjamin Ranaudo, killed when a bomb went off as he and a fellow soldier searched a compound north of Tarin Kowt, 19 July 2009; Sapper Jacob Moerland, of 2nd Combat Engineer Regiment, killed by an improvised explosive device while on foot patrol in Oruzgan province on 7 June 2010; Sapper Darren Smith, of the same unit, killed by an improvised explosive device on 7 June 2010; Private Benjamin Chuck, Private Timothy Aplin and Private Scott Palmer, all from 2nd Commando Regiment, killed when the helicopter they were in crashed on its way to the mission south of the Australian base at Tarin Kowt on 21 June 2010; Private Nathan Bewes, from 6th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment, killed by an improvised explosive device while on patrol in the Chora Valley region of Oruzgan province on 9 July 2010; Trooper Jason Thomas Brown, from the Special Air Service Regiment, killed after being shot during an engagement with insurgents on 14 August 2010; Private Tomas Dale and Private Grant Kirby, from 6th Battalion Royal Australian Regiment, killed by an improvised explosive device while on patrol in the Baluchi Valley, 20 August 2010; and finally—and hopefully the last; let it never happen again—Lance Corporal Jared MacKinney, 6th Battalion, killed during an intense firefight with Taliban insurgents in the Deh Rawud region, 24 August 2010.

I sincerely pray that no more names are to be added to that list. As repeated to me by their families, please do not let their sacrifice be in vain. There is more to be done. We must not cut

and run. We must honour that sacrifice. But, importantly, we must finish the job we set out to do.

**The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Hon. Peter Slipper)**—I thank the honourable member for Paterson for that contribution, and welcome Captain Towner to the Main Committee. I hope that you very much enjoy your experience here at Parliament House.

**Ms SAFFIN (Page)** (9.22 pm)—I begin my contribution on the motion to take note of the Prime Minister's statement on Australia's commitment to Afghanistan by paying tribute to our serving men and women, to those who have been injured—may we look after them well—to those who have paid the ultimate price, with their lives, and to their families that are left behind. May we also look after them well. I would like to give some context to some of the things that have been said in this debate and some of the things that we read in the papers. I will also talk a little about conflict prevention. In World War I, there were about 9.7 million military deaths and 6.8 million civilian deaths. In World War II, there were up to 25 million military deaths and somewhere between 40 million and 52 million civilian deaths. In wars now, from the figures I have found, over 90 per cent of deaths are civilian deaths. Sometimes when the debate is happening and being publicised, we are not so cognisant of these statistics.

I have had quite a number of constituents contact me and speak to me about this issue since I have been the member for Page, and this has increased recently because we are debating the matter here. Some people say that we should leave Afghanistan straightaway. Some people say we have to stay. Some people say that, if we continue to stay there, they will not be able to vote for us. Some people say that, if we do not stay there, they will not be able to vote for us. So people feel very passionate about this issue, as they should. Last year I had occasion to speak at the Bonalbo RSL subbranch. I sat with Tom Hale, who is a World War II veteran and an ex-POW from the Burma railway. I had some very interesting conversations with him. The topic of my talk at the RSL was Afghanistan. I took the opportunity to talk about some of the successes. We often hear a lot about what is wrong, what is not working, the failures, and we do not hear a lot about what is working. I was able to go through some of the things that are working. I was a bit daunted because there was someone there from 6RAR. I will not name him, but he was home on leave from serving in Afghanistan. It was a little bit daunting talking with him in the audience, but he was delightful and I know he serves us well there.

I also have had a conversation with a constituent who is the mother of a serving soldier in Afghanistan, and she feels quite passionate about it. She talked to me about when we will be able to leave and things like that, but at the same time she wants us there and wants the job well done. There is a conflict around it. Like a lot of members, I have been contacted by a whole range of groups from around the country, particularly social justice groups. The Australian Catholic Bishops Conference, ACFID, the Australian Anti-Bases Campaign Coalition, Pax Christi, Jason Thomas, who is a commentator, and all sorts of people and organisations have contacted us. My local newspapers have been talking about the issue. There was an editorial in the *Daily Examiner* by David Bancroft, the editor, with the headline 'Keeping the Peace'. I would like to put on record the last two sentences from an article that Chris Masters wrote:

There is no question that our soldiers should leave Afghanistan, and leave sooner rather than later. But only once the job is done.

That is the overwhelming feeling that comes from the community. That is the commitment of the government and the opposition and the message of most of the comments that have been made in this place.

There is currently talk about whether or not we should talk with the Taliban. My information and experience leads me to the view that we always have to talk to those that we seek to make peace with in some way, whether that be through military or other means. But it should always be done strategically, for some sort of strategic advantage. The Taliban regime that ruled Afghanistan was toppled in 2002, but the Taliban are certainly a part of life in Afghanistan. There has been quite a lot of commentary about that recently. I always remember very well what the wonderful President Nelson Mandela said: 'We don't make peace with our friends.' We make it, obviously, with our enemies.

A number of wars in the 1990s ended in negotiated settlement. Negotiated settlement is more than military victory alone. Military victory is one part of it, and a key part, and that is why we have the counterinsurgency. The counterinsurgency came a bit later in Afghanistan, and some people have made some comments about that, but we cannot revisit the past. David Kilcullen's book *Counterinsurgency* defines 'insurgency' as:

An organised movement aimed at the overthrow of the constituted government through the use of subversion and armed conflict.

'Counterinsurgency', which we hear a lot about, is defined as:

An umbrella term that describes the complete range of measures that governments take to defeat insurgency. These measures may be political, administrative, military, economic, psychological, or informational, and are almost always used in combination.

I think that sums up it up well.

I would like to acknowledge Major Anastasia Roberts, who is in my office as part of the ADF program, for pulling together some of that research for me. I would also like to acknowledge another person in my office, Luke Gosling, who served in the commandos in Afghanistan. So I have had some interesting conversations about Afghanistan in my office this week.

We know also that with counterinsurgency—again it comes out of Kilcullen's book—there has to be respect for the local people. Their wellbeing has to be put ahead of any other consideration. We have to convince the threatened populations that we are the winning side. We need to develop genuine partnerships. We have to demonstrate that we can protect them and that their best interests are served by cooperating with us.

Afghanistan is a very complex country with complex terrain. It is difficult for the military to operate in a contested political environment, even at the behest of the government and even under the Security Council resolutions under which they operate, and there has been quite a number of them. It is a politically contested environment and therein lie some difficulties. And I have had a wee bit of experience in that particular area. Afghanistan is bordered by a range of countries and it has very porous borders. The country has a long history of conflict, not always of the locals' making. The city of Kandahar is named after Alexander the Great. This conflict goes back a long way but it also has changing dimensions to it. It can be a very harsh and unyielding country. We know of some of the challenges with what is happening now: it is a difficult land to traverse; there are many peoples; and there are a number of con-

flicts. Then there is the issue of the resources of the ISAF, with 47 nations contributing to it. That in itself takes some organisation and coordination. There are multilateral development partners, multilateral donors and many other issues. Also, in Afghanistan in south-west Asia there are four of the most important regionally available water resources, and there are issues around that.

One thing I would like to comment on is that there is a Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention—an international one—and I am on the executive of that. I have had teleconferences with women MPs from Afghanistan and also from Pakistan. I have had an opportunity to have some conversations because I chair the subcommittee on women, peace and security of the Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention. At the Kabul conference earlier this year over 70 countries got together to talk about the way forward, cooperation, development partners, civil-military cooperation and all of those key issues. Working with women members of parliament, and others from the countries, we sent an open letter to the participants at the conference. A number of things were addressed in the document and I seek leave to incorporate the document in *Hansard*.

Leave granted.

*The document read as follows—*

STRENGTHENING THE ROLE OF WOMEN MPs IN PEACE AND SECURITY IN AFGHANISTAN

OPEN LETTER TO THE PARTICIPANTS AT THE KABUL CONFERENCE

The Parliamentarians Network for Conflict Prevention, in light of the upcoming Kabul Conference, call upon the international community and the Afghan Government to encourage and support the participation of women representatives and women in all aspects of the security dialogue from peacebuilding to conflict resolution, from stabilization to developmental aspects in Afghanistan.

It is incumbent upon all delegates of the Kabul Conference to be guided by and inculcate into actions and outcomes, including the conference organization, the SC Resolution 1325.

Stressing the important role that women MPs play in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peacebuilding processes, members of parliaments from Afghanistan, and from around the world:

Encourage the equal participation of women MPs and their full involvement in all relevant peace and security processes as well as in various multinational mechanisms for the prevention, management and resolution of conflict efforts and for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security;

Support the increased representation of Afghan women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions, especially concerning conflict prevention and conflict resolution;

Urge the international community and the Afghan government to ensure that the Afghan Plan for Peace and Reintegration (APPR) takes into account all constitutional rights of women and women MPs in Afghanistan;

Calls upon the participants at the Kabul Conference to ensure that the pledges of the international community are not used to undermine basic human rights for women in any way;

Requests the government of Afghanistan to take all necessary measures (including security ones) to ensure women are able to take part in key decision-making and leadership positions as well as supporting their participation in the upcoming parliamentary elections;

Noting a lack of support from the international community for women MPs in Afghanistan, the PN encourages parliamentarians worldwide to come forward and support concerns and demands of the Afghan women including women MPs.

**Ms SAFFIN**—I thank honourable members. It is a very nice letter and a useful contribution to the debate. It has been a very rewarding and interesting experience to have that contact. I will have more contact in December when I will be hosting a conference with some of the women MPs from the region to talk more about peace and security. I managed to get the letter to a range of the countries that participated, including Australia, and also to the Secretary-General's office. Security Council resolution 1325 mandates that women have to play a very active and key role in all peacemaking efforts where we are trying to work through conflicts. It is easier said than done. But it is an important resolution and one that I work with in this particular area.

I am quite proud of Australia's contribution. Our ambassador is Paul Foley. I have worked with him before. He is a good ambassador with a great team, and they are working to support all of the efforts. It is not easy for the civilians who work there or for the large number of NGOs that are working there doing great work on the ground. They are all working to help support strengthening the state. State building is not easy. In the debate I hear people talk about it being a corrupt government. Yes, there is corruption, but they speak as if it were abnormal, which it is not. We have to address it, but there is no way that the state of Afghanistan could be a corruption resistant regime overnight. These are things we have to work through. I have also looked at the situation with the elections. When my friend Peter Galbraith left his job there even he said that we have to stay the distance. He left for certain reasons to do with the election.

It takes time. We and the public become impatient. We of course do not like seeing our serving men die in wars, so we become impatient. But it takes a lot of effort and a lot of time to help rebuild a state. (*Time expired*)

**Mr SCHULTZ** (Hume) (9.37 pm)—I take this opportunity to compliment the member for Page for her ongoing commitment and dedication to the people of East Timor. I am pleased to rise to speak about Australia's involvement in the reconstruction of Afghanistan. From the outset I pay tribute to the outstanding performance of our young men and women in the Australian Defence Forces who over the past nine years have proven their dedication and commitment to the mission and have made our country exceptionally proud in doing so. I also acknowledge the sacrifice of the 20 young men who have given their lives in this conflict in the pursuit of bringing peace and security to all Australians. We will never be able to completely repay the debt we owe to these brave men and their families and friends at home.

But it is not the outstanding performance of our Defence Force—for that is surely without question—that has brought this debate to the floor of the House of Representatives. The Australian people deserve to hear from this government what the mission in Afghanistan will entail from this point onwards and what this mission means to our national security. So, why are we in Afghanistan, and what is our mission? While the fall of the Berlin Wall may seem a lifetime ago, the first decade of the 21st century is seared into our consciousness. The dreadful and tragic events of the September 11 attacks on New York and Washington DC in 2001 by the al-Qaeda-trained Islamic terrorists were stark illustrations to the world that failed states such as Afghanistan were havens of state-sponsored Islamic terrorism.

In 1996, Saudi dissident Osama bin Laden moved to Afghanistan. Upon the Taliban's seizing of power, bin Laden forged an alliance between the Taliban and his organisation, al-Qaeda. It has been suggested that the Taliban and bin Laden had very close connections and

that al-Qaeda-trained fighters known as the 055 Brigade were incorporated into the Taliban army between 1997 and 2001. Although none of us will be able to erase the events of that day from our memories, it is important to outline that the state-sponsored Islamic terrorism in Afghanistan was essential to the success of the terrorist attacks on September 11, 2001. The September 11 attacks against the United States were coordinated by al-Qaeda and involved 19 al-Qaeda-trained Islamic terrorists who hijacked four commercial passenger jets, which were subsequently and deliberately crashed into major state buildings.

Nearly 3,000 victims, along with the 19 terrorists, died in the attacks. According to the New York State Department of Health, 836 responders, including firefighters and police personnel, died responding to the attacks. Among the 2,752 victims who died in the attacks on the World Trade Center were 343 firefighters and 60 police officers from New York City and the Port Authority. An additional 184 people were killed in the attack on the Pentagon. The overwhelming majority of casualties were civilians, including nationals of 77 countries. Fifteen Australians were killed in the September 11 attacks.

The terrorist attacks on the United States on September 11 galvanised the world, including Australia, into supporting military action to bring an end to state-sponsored terrorism in Afghanistan. In response to the heinous atrocity of the September 11 attacks and the recalcitrance of the Taliban in refusing to extradite bin Laden and the al-Qaeda leadership to the United States for prosecution, President Bush announced on 7 October 2001, under the auspices of Operation Enduring Freedom, that combat operations against Afghanistan and the Taliban would commence. The initial military objectives of Operation Enduring Freedom can be broadly outlined as the destruction of terrorist training camps and infrastructure within Afghanistan, the capture of al-Qaeda leaders and the cessation of terrorist activities in Afghanistan.

The United States cited article 51 of the UN Charter as the legal justification for the invasion of Afghanistan. Article 51 states:

Nothing in the present Charter shall impair the inherent right of individual or collective self-defence if an armed attack occurs against a Member of the United Nations, until the Security Council has taken measures necessary to maintain international peace and security.

The legal criteria for the initiation of the war under the UN Charter were comprehensively—and, it must be said, tragically—met. On 5 October 2001 member states of NATO invoked article 5 of the Washington treaty, which states that an armed attack on one or more of the allies in Europe or North America shall be considered an attack against them all.

The International Security Assistance Force is a North Atlantic Treaty Organisation led security mission in Afghanistan, established by the United Nations Security Council on 20 December 2001 by resolution 1386. ISAF was initially charged with securing Kabul and the surrounding area from the Taliban, al-Qaeda and factional warlords to allow for the establishment of the Afghan transitional administration, headed by President Hamid Karzai. ISAF comprises 47 nations, including Australia, and there are now almost 120,000 ISAF personnel in Afghanistan.

In the aftermath of the September 11 attacks Australia, under the coalition government, stood shoulder to shoulder with our American cousins. On 17 September 2001, Prime Minister John Howard announced to the parliament that the then government, of which I was a proud member, would be involved in invoking the ANZUS treaty and pledging military and

other assistance to the global effort to stamp out state-sponsored terrorism. The invocation of the ANZUS treaty by Prime Minister Howard had bipartisan support in the parliament. This was the first time the treaty's clauses on acting to meet a common danger had been invoked since the treaty was enacted in 1952. On 4 October 2001 the government directed the Chief of the Defence Force to have a range of military assets, including special forces, available to support the US under the ANZUS treaty.

Our forces in Afghanistan are doing a remarkable job in difficult and dangerous circumstances. But in the finest military tradition of the Anzacs, our troops are performing magnificently despite the inhospitable terrain of a country that has defeated armies stretching back to Alexander the Great. Our Special Operations team strikes fear into Taliban to the point where the enemy will break contact or manoeuvre rather than face our ghosts at night.

Our troops are fighting side-by-side with Afghan National Army forces as part of the remote operational mentoring and liaison teams. These deployments illustrate the success of the mission in Afghanistan that has been implemented since February 2008 as part of the Mentoring and Reconstruction Task Force. The current Labor government altered this mission to commence mentoring and training the Afghan National Army and police whilst continuing reconstruction and population protection.

On 21 October 2008, the defence minister issued a press release that outlined the revised mission in Afghanistan. It stated:

"The handover marks a new chapter for the Australian Defence Force in Afghanistan, with a new focus on building the capacity of the Afghan National Army in Oruzgan Province," Mr Fitzgibbon said.

"It forms part of Australia's coordinated approach in Oruzgan Province of disrupting extremists, building infrastructure and increasing the capacity of the Afghan Army.

However, the government's message remained confused. The PM, in his National Security Statement of 4 December 2008, stated:

In Afghanistan, our objective is to reduce the spread of terrorism by helping Afghanistan build a more peaceful and stable state and so reduce the risk of that country once again becoming a safe haven and a training base for terrorist organisations with global reach.

In reality, the government has moved almost exclusively to training and mentoring the Afghan National Army. Therefore, it was a relief to gain clarity from the Chief of Defence Force, Air Chief Marshal Houston, who reiterated, during a 13 September 2010 media roundtable, Australia's objectives in Afghanistan. He stated:

Australia has clearly defined goals in Afghanistan. To deny sanctuary to terrorists; to stabilise Afghanistan; and to train the Afghan National Army 4<sup>th</sup> Brigade in Oruzgan to protect the key population centres in the province and ultimately hand over security responsibility to the Afghans themselves.

Therefore, in addition to reconstruction efforts in Oruzgan province, MRTF-1's role also included capacity-building and mentoring of the Afghan National Army.

Australia is leading the way in training and promoting the development of the Afghan people in determining their own destiny. The mentoring of the Afghan National Army 4th Brigade has now become the primary focus of our engagement in Afghanistan. Mentoring the 4th Brigade has its challenges, but is gradually reaping rewards. The 4th Brigade being capable of controlling Oruzgan is the key to enabling our troops to be withdrawn so that the Afghans can

control their own destiny in a safe and secure place where the people can live without fear of reprisals from the Taliban and other criminal elements.

There is still room for the Karzai government to improve its levels of governance beyond the major cities, to the regional areas where the Taliban still have considerable influence and are seen as the alternative government. Coupled with this is the need for the Karzai administration to rid the country of the endemic levels of corruption at all levels of government. Indeed, we are paying \$250 million towards getting that contingent to a capacity and capability that will ensure long-term security for the people of that country.

We are there for the duration, until the job is done. The coalition supports the continuing deployment of Australian forces in Afghanistan, as such action focuses on defeating the threat of terrorism at its source. Afghanistan has long been a training ground for terrorists, including those who perpetrated the attacks in Bali and Jakarta and against our embassy in Indonesia.

Over the past decade, 111 Australians have been killed by terrorist attacks that were planned and executed from terrorist safe havens in the mountains of Afghanistan: 12 October 2002, Kuta, Bali, 88 Australians killed; 9 September 2004, Australian Embassy, Jakarta, nine Indonesians killed and 150-plus injured; 7 July 2005, London, train and bus bombings, one Australian killed and 11 injured; 1 October 2005, Jimbaran Beach, Kuta, Bali, four Australians killed and 19 injured; 17 July 2009, Marriott and Ritz-Carlton hotels, Jakarta, three Australians killed. The terrorist threat to Australia is very real. It was the simultaneous presence at al-Qaeda camps in Afghanistan of militants from across South-East Asia that facilitated many of the personal relationships that exist between Jemaah Islamiah and members of other violent Islamist groups.

The mission in Afghanistan is critical to Australia's national security interests. However, in this parliamentary debate we have heard from some elements on the fringe of the political spectrum that believe Australia's interests lie in withdrawing Australian troops before our mission is complete. These elements, particularly the Greens party, have spent nearly as much time denigrating the war in Afghanistan and our alliance with the United States as they have in wilfully choosing to neglect the broad strategic, political, security and moral imperatives that have led to Australia's United Nations sanctioned participation in this conflict, and the imperatives for us to remain until our mission is complete.

The coalition supports a strategy that, in the first instance, denies Afghanistan as a training ground and operations base for al-Qaeda and other terrorist organisations. Secondly, we support the stabilisation of the Afghan state through the combination of civil, police and military training for local Afghans, to enable them to achieve self-determination within a reasonable period of time. It will more than likely be a protracted engagement that will require long-term efforts to reconstruct the social fabric of that country.

Within the context of framing the debate, we need to focus on the Greens' foreign and security policy, which respected journalist Paul Kelly recently described as:

... a world view, documented point by point, stunning in its isolationist utopian pacifist philosophy, unsuitable for the responsibility of nationhood. Long ignored, it needs to see sunlight.

The Greens leader, Senator Bob Brown, has publicly called for Australia to abandon our mission in Afghanistan—this coming from the leader of a minor political party who has not visited our troops in the field to see the conditions and the positive impact our presence is hav-

ing. Nor have the Greens and their leadership sought a briefing from the government on the mission. When it comes to national security, the Greens appear more concerned with appealing to the inner-city intellectual left than with availing themselves of the facts of our mission in Afghanistan.

Our mission in Afghanistan is critical to Australia's national security interests today and will be in the future. Our troops deserve to have a clearly defined mission, and Afghanistan deserves a chance to become a self-sufficient nation state without being subjugated by an extremist ideology.

*(Extension of time granted)* I thank the members of this House for their indulgence in granting me an extension of time. It gives me the opportunity to talk about the significant contributions made by members from all sides of the parliament in this debate. From time to time in such debates people like me take the opportunity to remind the community about some elements within the Australian parliament who have different views from the majority of members in the House, but I have to say that the speakers have all had one thing in common: their care and concern for their fellow Australians overseas. I hope that that care and concern is resonating from the parliament to the mainstream community concerning the wonderful contribution these young men and women are making for their government on behalf of the Australian people. These young people do not wish to go. As you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, they are directed to go there through the Australian Defence Force processes.

The very difficult situation that our young men and women in armed conflict find themselves in regarding the rules of engagement, and the problems associated with three of our well-trained Defence Force personnel from our commando brigades being charged, has also been raised in this place. Whilst their situation is the subject of an inquiry within the ADF, I know I speak on behalf of all of my parliamentary colleagues here, and certainly on behalf of my constituents and all fair-minded Australians, in saying that every possible legal assistance should be given to these fine young men. While we do not know the full details of the circumstances centred around the charges that have been laid against them, we do know that they were doing their duty on behalf of their nation and that they were doing it in the tradition of the duty that all young men and women who have gone into conflict on behalf of their country have carried out on behalf of this country for decades.

I want the community to know that I can confidently say on behalf of all of the members of parliament here that we have the best interests of those young men at heart and that we wish them well. We trust that the process—a process that was introduced because of some changes to particular UN charters some time back—turns out to be fair and equitable in terms of justice. We hope that it does not go down the path of the trial of Breaker Morant many, many years ago. That was a travesty of justice because it was driven by people within the British system of military justice and history has shown that the way it was handled was very, very bad.

But I am confident because as Australians we, whilst perhaps a little roguish in the way in which we carry on individually, are fair people when it comes to the crunch. I trust that that fairness, concern and compassion for our fellow Australians comes to the fore when these young well-trained epitomes of Australia's finest come to trial. I hope that the outcome is such that the Australian people will have significant confidence in the ability of the ADF to protect their own when the time arises.

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I thank the parliament for the opportunity to participate in this debate and, more specifically, I once again thank my parliamentary colleagues on both sides of the House for allowing me the opportunity to say a few more words about the men and women whom we love and care for in our Defence Force.

Debate (on motion by **Mr Forrest**) adjourned.

**Main Committee adjourned at 9.59 pm**