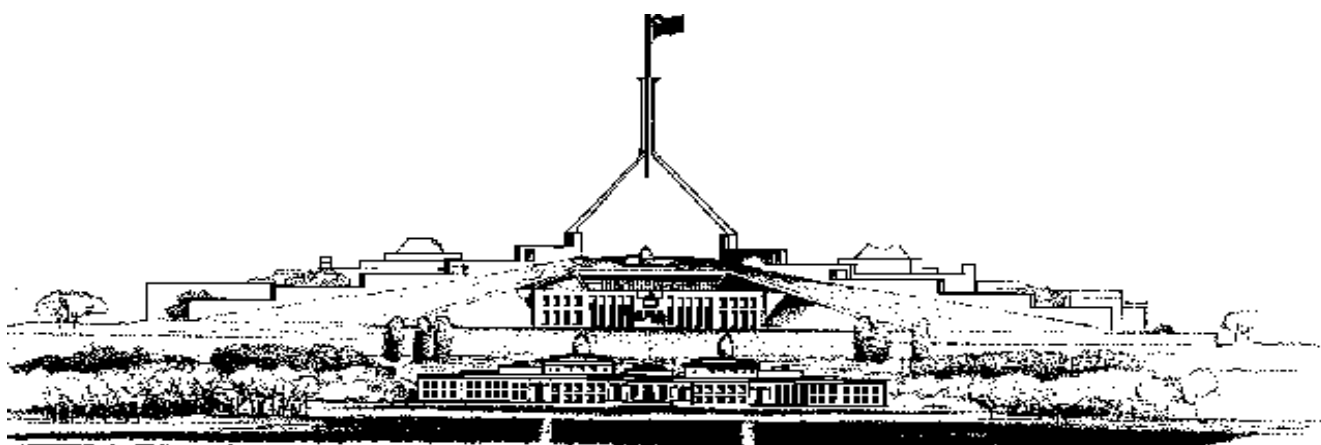




COMMONWEALTH OF AUSTRALIA

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES



House of Representatives

Official Hansard

No. 3, 2017

Monday, 27 February 2017

FORTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SECOND PERIOD

BY AUTHORITY OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

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SITTING DAYS—2017

Month	Date
February	7, 8, 9, 13, 14, 15, 16, 27 28
March	1, 2, 20, 21, 22, 23, 27, 28, 29, 30
May	9, 10, 11, 22, 23, 24, 25, 29, 30, 31
June	1, 13, 14, 15, 19, 20, 21, 22
August	8, 9, 10, 14, 15, 16, 17
September	4, 5, 6, 7, 11, 12, 13, 14
October	16, 17, 18, 19, 23, 24, 25, 26
November	27, 28, 29, 30
December	4, 5, 6, 7

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**FORTY-FIFTH PARLIAMENT
FIRST SESSION—SECOND PERIOD**

Governor-General

His Excellency General the Hon. Sir Peter Cosgrove AK, MC (Retd)

House of Representatives Office Holders

Speaker—Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn Smith MP

Deputy Speaker—Mr Mark Maclean Coulton MP

Second Deputy Speaker—Mr Robert George Mitchell MP

Members of the Speaker's Panel—Hon. Sharon Leah Bird MP, Mr Russell Evan Broadbent MP, Mr Scott Andrew Buchholz MP, Ms Sharon Catherine Claydon MP, Mr Steven Georganas MP, Mr Ian Reginald Goodenough MP, Mr Andrew William Hastie MP, Mr Kevin John Hogan MP, Mr Stephen James Irons MP, Mr Craig Kelly MP, Ms Maria Vamvakinou MP, Mr Ross Xavier Vasta MP and Mrs Lucy Elizabeth Wicks MP

Leader of the House—Hon. Christopher Pyne MP

Deputy Leader of the House—Hon. Darren Chester MP

Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Anthony Stephen Burke MP

Deputy Manager of Opposition Business—Hon. Mark Dreyfus QC MP

Party Leaders and Whips

Liberal Party of Australia

Leader—Hon. Malcolm Bligh Turnbull MP

Deputy Leader—Hon. Julie Isabel Bishop MP

Chief Government Whip—Ms Nola Bethwyn Marino MP

Government Whips—Mr Albertus Johannes van Manen MP and Mr Rowan Eric Ramsey MP

The Nationals

Leader—Hon. Barnaby Thomas Gerard Joyce MP

Deputy Leader—Senator the Hon Fiona Nash

Chief Whip—Mr George Robert Christenson MP

Deputy Whip—Ms Michelle Leanne Landry MP

Australian Labor Party

Leader—Hon. William Richard Shorten MP

Deputy Leader—Hon. Tanya Joan Plibersek MP

Chief Opposition Whip—Mr Christopher Patrick Hayes MP

Opposition Whips—Ms Joanne Catherine Ryan MP and Mr Graham Douglas Perrett MP

Printed by authority of the House of Representatives

Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
Abbott, Hon. Anthony John	Warringah, NSW	LP
Albanese, Hon. Anthony Norman	Grayndler, NSW	ALP
Alexander, Mr John Gilbert, OAM	Bennelong, NSW	LP
Aly, Dr Anne	Cowan, WA	ALP
Andrews, Hon. Karen Lesley	McPherson, QLD	LP
Andrews, Hon. Kevin James	Menzies, VIC	LP
Bandt, Mr Adam Paul	Melbourne, VIC	AG
Banks, Ms Julia Helen	Chisholm, VIC	LP
Bird, Hon. Sharon Leah	Cunningham, NSW	ALP
Bishop, Hon. Julie Isabel	Curtin, WA	LP
Bowen, Hon. Christopher Eyles	McMahon, NSW	ALP
Broad, Mr Andrew John	Mallee, VIC	NATS
Broadbent, Mr Russell Evan	McMillan, VIC	LP
Brodthmann, Ms Gai Marie	Canberra, ACT	ALP
Buchholz, Mr Scott Andrew	Wright, QLD	LP
Burke, Hon. Anthony Stephen	Watson, NSW	ALP
Burney, Ms Linda Jean	Barton, NSW	ALP
Butler, Hon. Mark Christopher	Port Adelaide, SA	ALP
Butler, Ms Terri Megan	Griffith, QLD	ALP
Byrne, Hon. Anthony Michael	Holt, VIC	ALP
Chalmers, Dr James Edward	Rankin, QLD	ALP
Champion, Mr Nicholas David	Wakefield, SA	ALP
Chester, Hon. Darren Jeffrey	Gippsland, VIC	NATS
Chesters, Ms Lisa Marie	Bendigo, VIC	ALP
Christensen, Mr George Robert	Dawson, QLD	NATS
Ciobo, Hon. Steven Michele	Moncrieff, QLD	LP
Clare, Hon. Jason Dean	Blaxland, NSW	ALP
Claydon, Ms Sharon Catherine	Newcastle, NSW	ALP
Coleman, Mr David Bernard	Banks, NSW	LP
Collins, Hon. Julie Maree	Franklin, TAS	ALP
Conroy, Mr Patrick Martin	Shortland, NSW	ALP
Coulton, Mr Mark Maclean	Parkes, NSW	NATS
Crewther, Mr Christopher John	Dunkley, VIC	LP
Danby, Hon. Michael David	Melbourne Ports, VIC	ALP
Dick, Mr Dugald Milton	Oxley, QLD	ALP
Dreyfus, Hon. Mark Alfred, QC	Isaacs, VIC	ALP
Drum, Mr Damian Kevin	Murray, VIC	NATS
Dutton, Hon. Peter Craig	Dickson, QLD	LP
Elliot, Hon. Maria Justine	Richmond, NSW	ALP
Ellis, Hon. Katherine Margaret	Adelaide, SA	ALP
Entsch, Hon. Warren George	Leichhardt, QLD	LP
Evans, Mr Trevor Mark	Brisbane, QLD	LNP
Falinski, Mr Jason George	Mackellar, NSW	LP
Feeney, Hon. David	Batman, VIC	ALP
Fitzgibbon, Hon. Joel Andrew	Hunter, NSW	ALP
Fletcher, Hon. Paul William	Bradfield, NSW	LP
Flint, Ms Nicolle Jane	Boothby, SA	LP
Freeland, Mr Michael Randolph	Macarthur, NSW	ALP

Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
Frydenberg, Hon. Joshua Anthony	Kooyong, VIC	LP
Gee, Mr Andrew Robert	Calare, NSW	NATS
Georganas, Mr Steven	Hindmarsh, SA	ALP
Giles, Mr Andrew James	Scullin, VIC	ALP
Gillespie, Hon. Dr David Arthur	Lyne, NSW	NATS
Goodenough, Mr Ian Reginald	Moore, WA	LP
Gosling, Mr Luke John	Solomon, NT	ALP
Hammond, Mr Timothy Jerome	Perth, WA	ALP
Hart, Mr Ross Anthony	Bass, TAS	ALP
Hartsuyker, Hon. Luke	Cowper, NSW	NATS
Hastie, Mr Andrew William	Canning, WA	LP
Hawke, Hon. Alexander George	Mitchell, NSW	LP
Hayes, Mr Christopher Patrick	Fowler, NSW	ALP
Henderson, Ms Sarah Moya	Corangamite, VIC	LP
Hill, Mr Julian Christopher	Bruce, VIC	ALP
Hogan, Mr Kevin John	Page, NSW	NATS
Howarth, Mr Luke Ronald	Petrie, QLD	LP
Hunt, Hon. Gregory Andrew	Flinders, VIC	LP
Husar, Ms Emma	Lindsay, NSW	ALP
Husic, Hon. Edham Nurredin	Chifley, NSW	ALP
Irons, Mr Stephen James	Swan, WA	LP
Jones, Mr Stephen Patrick	Whitlam, NSW	ALP
Joyce, Hon. Barnaby Thomas Gerard	New England, NSW	NATS
Katter, Hon. Robert Carl	Kennedy, QLD	AUS
Keay, Ms Justine Terri	Braddon, TAS	ALP
Keenan, Hon. Michael Fayat	Stirling, WA	LP
Kelly, Mr Craig	Hughes, NSW	LP
Kelly, Mr Michael Joseph	Eden-Monaro	ALP
Keogh, Mr Matthew James	Burt, WA	ALP
Khalil, Mr Peter	Wills, VIC	ALP
King, Hon. Catherine Fiona	Ballarat, VIC	ALP
King, Ms Madeleine Mary Harvie	Brand, WA	ALP
Lamb, Ms Susan	Longman, QLD	ALP
Laming, Mr Andrew Charles	Bowman, QLD	LP
Landry, Ms Michelle Leanne	Capricornia, QLD	NATS
Laundy, Hon. Craig Arthur Samuel	Reid, NSW	LP
Leigh, Hon. Dr Andrew Keith	Fraser, ACT	ALP
Leeser, Mr Julian Martin	Berowra, NSW	LP
Ley, Hon. Sussan Penelope	Farrer, NSW	LP
Littleproud, Mr David Kelly	Maranoa, QLD	LNP
Macklin, Hon. Jennifer Louise	Jagajaga, VIC	ALP
Marino, Ms Nola Bethwyn	Forrest, WA	LP
Marles, Hon. Richard Donald	Corio, VIC	ALP
McBride, Ms Emma Margaret	Dobell, NSW	ALP
McCormack, Hon. Michael Francis	Riverina, NSW	NATS
McGowan, Ms Catherine, AO	Indi, VIC	IND
McVeigh, Hon. Dr John Joseph	Groom, QLD	LNP
Mitchell, Mr Brian Keith	Lyons, TAS	ALP

Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
Mitchell, Mr Robert George	McEwen, VIC	ALP
Morrison, Hon. Scott John	Cook, NSW	LP
Morton, Mr Ben	Tangney, WA	LP
Neumann, Hon. Shayne Kenneth	Blair, QLD	ALP
O'Brien, Mr Llewellyn Stephen	Wide Bay, QLD	LNP
O'Brien, Mr Ted Lynam	Fairfax, QLD	LNP
O'Connor, Hon. Brendan Patrick John	Gorton, VIC	ALP
O'Dowd, Mr Kenneth Desmond	Flynn, QLD	NATS
O'Dwyer, Hon. Ms Kelly Megan	Higgins, VIC	LP
O'Neil, Ms Clare Ellen	Hotham, VIC	ALP
O'Toole, Ms Catherine Elizabeth	Herbert, QLD	ALP
Owens, Ms Julie Ann	Parramatta, NSW	ALP
Pasin, Mr Antony	Barker, SA	LP
Perrett, Mr Graham Douglas	Moreton, QLD	ALP
Pitt, Hon. Keith John	Hinkler, QLD	NATS
Plibersek, Hon. Tanya Joan	Sydney, NSW	ALP
Porter, Hon. Charles Christian	Pearce, WA	LP
Prentice, Hon. Jane	Ryan, QLD	LP
Price, Ms Melissa Lee	Durack, WA	LP
Pyne, Hon. Christopher Maurice	Sturt, SA	LP
Ramsey, Mr Rowan Eric	Grey, SA	LP
Rishworth, Hon. Amanda Louise	Kingston, SA	ALP
Robert, Hon. Stuart Rowland	Fadden, QLD	LP
Rowland, Ms Michelle Anne	Greenway, NSW	ALP
Ryan, Ms Joanne Catherine	Lalor, VIC	ALP
Sharkie, Ms Rebekha Carina Che	Mayo, SA	NXT
Shorten, Hon. William Richard	Maribyrnong, VIC	ALP
Smith, Hon. Anthony David Hawthorn	Casey, VIC	LP
Snowdon, Hon. Warren Edward	Lingiari, NT	ALP
Stanley, Ms Anne Maree	Werriwa, NSW	ALP
Sudmalis, Ms Ann Elizabeth	Gilmore, NSW	LP
Sukkar, Mr Michael Sven	Deakin, VIC	LP
Swan, Hon. Wayne Maxwell	Lilley, QLD	ALP
Swanson, Ms Meryl Jane	Paterson, NSW	ALP
Taylor, Hon. Angus James	Hume, NSW	LP
Tehan, Hon. Daniel Thomas	Wannon, VIC	LP
Templeman, Ms Susan Raye	Macquarie, NSW	ALP
Thistlethwaite, Hon. Matthew James	Kingsford Smith, NSW	ALP
Tudge, Hon. Alan Edward	Aston, VIC	LP
Turnbull, Hon. Malcolm Bligh	Wentworth, NSW	LP
Vamvakinou, Ms Maria	Calwell, VIC	ALP
van Manen, Mr Albertus Johannes	Forde, QLD	LP
Vasta, Mr Ross Xavier	Bonner, QLD	LP
Wallace, Mr Andrew Bruce	Fisher, QLD	LNP
Watts, Mr Timothy Graham	Gellibrand, VIC	ALP
Wicks, Mrs Lucy Elizabeth	Robertson, NSW	LP
Wilkie, Mr Andrew Damien	Denison, TAS	IND
Wilson, Mr Joshua Hamilton	Fremantle, WA	ALP

Members of the House of Representatives

Members	Division	Party
Wilson, Mr Richard James	O'Connor, WA	LP
Wilson, Mr Timothy Robert	Goldstein, VIC	LP
Wood, Mr Jason Peter	La Trobe, VIC	LP
Wyatt, Hon. Kenneth George, AM	Hasluck, WA	LP
Zappia, Mr Antonio	Makin, SA	ALP
Zimmerman, Mr Trent Moir	North Sydney, NSW	LP

PARTY ABBREVIATIONS

AG—Australian Greens; ALP—Australian Labor Party; AUS—Katter's Australia Party;
 IND—Independent; LNP—Liberal National Party; LP—Liberal Party of Australia;
 NATS—The Nationals; NXT—Nick Xenophon Team

Heads of Parliamentary Departments

Acting Clerk of the Senate—R Pye
 Clerk of the House of Representatives—D Elder
 Secretary, Department of Parliamentary Services—R Stefanic
 Parliamentary Budget Officer—P Bowen

TURNBULL MINISTRY

Title	Minister
Prime Minister	Hon Malcolm Turnbull MP
Minister for Indigenous Affairs	Senator the Hon Nigel Scullion
Minister for Women	Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash
<i>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Public Service</i>	<i>Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash</i>
<i>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Counter-Terrorism</i>	<i>Hon Michael Keenan MP</i>
<i>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Cabinet</i>	<i>Senator the Hon Scott Ryan</i>
<i>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for Cyber Security</i>	<i>Hon Dan Tehan MP</i>
<i>Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister</i>	<i>Senator the Hon James McGrath</i>
<i>Assistant Minister for Cities and Digital Transformation</i>	<i>Hon Angus Taylor MP</i>
Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources	Hon Barnaby Joyce MP
<i>Assistant Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources</i>	<i>Senator the Hon Anne Ruston</i>
<i>Assistant Minister to the Deputy Prime Minister</i>	<i>Hon Luke Hartsuyker MP</i>
Minister for Foreign Affairs	Hon Julie Bishop MP
Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment	Hon Steve Ciobo MP
Minister for International Development and the Pacific	Senator the Hon Concetta Fierravanti-Wells
<i>Assistant Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment</i>	<i>Hon Keith Pitt MP</i>
Attorney-General (Vice-President of the Executive Council) (Leader of the Government in the Senate)	Senator the Hon George Brandis QC
Minister for Justice	Hon Michael Keenan MP
Treasurer	Hon Scott Morrison MP
Minister for Revenue and Financial Services	Hon Kelly O'Dwyer MP
Minister for Small Business	Hon Michael McCormack MP
<i>Assistant Minister to the Treasurer</i>	<i>Hon Michael Sukkar MP</i>
Minister for Finance (Deputy Leader of Government in the Senate)	Senator the Hon Mathias Cormann
Special Minister of State	Senator the Hon Scott Ryan
Minister for Regional Development	Senator the Hon Fiona Nash
Minister for Local Government and Territories	Senator the Hon Fiona Nash
Minister for Infrastructure and Transport (Deputy Leader of the House)	Hon Darren Chester MP
Minister for Urban Infrastructure	Hon Paul Fletcher MP
Minister for Defence	Senator the Hon Marise Payne
Minister for Defence Industry (Leader of the House)	Hon Christopher Pyne MP
Minister for Veterans' Affairs	Hon Dan Tehan MP
<i>Minister Assisting the Prime Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC</i>	<i>Hon Dan Tehan MP</i>
Minister for Defence Personnel	Hon Dan Tehan MP
Minister for Immigration and Border Protection	Hon Peter Dutton MP
<i>Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection</i>	<i>Hon Alex Hawke MP</i>
Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science	Senator the Hon Arthur Sinodinos AO
Minister for Resources and Northern Australia	Senator the Hon Matt Canavan

Title	Minister
<i>Assistant Minister for Industry, Innovation and Science</i>	<i>Hon Craig Laundy MP</i>
Minister for Health	Hon Greg Hunt MP
Minister for Sport	Hon Greg Hunt MP
Minister for Aged Care	Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP
Minister for Indigenous Health	Hon Ken Wyatt AM MP
<i>Assistant Minister for Health</i>	<i>Hon Dr David Gillespie MP</i>
Minister for Communications	Senator the Hon Mitch Fifield
Minister for the Arts (Manager of Government Business in the Senate)	Senator the Hon Mitch Fifield
Minister for Regional Communications	Senator the Hon Fiona Nash
Minister for Employment	Senator the Hon Michaelia Cash
Minister for Social Services	Hon Christian Porter MP
Minister for Human Services	Hon Alan Tudge MP
<i>Assistant Minister for Social Services and Disability Services</i>	<i>Hon Jane Prentice MP</i>
<i>Assistant Minister for Social Services and Multicultural Affairs</i>	<i>Senator the Hon Zed Seselja</i>
Minister for Education and Training	Senator the Hon Simon Birmingham
<i>Assistant Minister for Vocational Education and Skills</i>	<i>Hon Karen Andrews MP</i>
Minister for the Environment and Energy	Hon Josh Frydenberg MP

Each box represents a portfolio. **Cabinet Ministers are shown in bold type.** As a general rule, there is one department in each portfolio. However, there is a Department of Human Services in the Social Services portfolio and a Department of Veterans' Affairs in the Defence portfolio. The title of a department does not necessarily reflect the title of a minister in all cases. Assistant Ministers in italics are designated as Parliamentary Secretaries under the *Ministers of State Act 1952*.

SHADOW MINISTRY

Title	Shadow Minister
Leader of the Opposition	Hon Bill Shorten MP
Shadow Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders	Hon Bill Shorten MP
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders</i>	<i>Senator Patrick Dodson</i>
<i>Shadow Cabinet Secretary</i>	<i>Senator the Hon Jacinta Collins</i>
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Preventing Family Violence</i>	<i>Terri Butler MP</i>
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister to the Leader (Tasmania)</i>	<i>Senator Helen Polley</i>
Deputy Leader of the Opposition	Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
Shadow Minister for Education	Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
Shadow Minister for Women	Hon Tanya Plibersek MP
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Schools</i>	<i>Andrew Giles MP</i>
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Universities</i>	<i>Terri Butler MP</i>
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Equality</i>	<i>Terri Butler MP</i>
Leader of the Opposition in the Senate	Senator the Hon Penny Wong
Shadow Minister for Foreign Affairs	Senator the Hon Penny Wong
<i>Shadow Minister for International Development and the Pacific</i>	<i>Senator Claire Moore</i>
Deputy Leader of the Opposition in the Senate	Senator the Hon Don Farrell
Shadow Special Minister of State	Senator the Hon Don Farrell
<i>Shadow Minister for Sport</i>	<i>Senator the Hon Don Farrell</i>
Shadow Treasurer	Hon Chris Bowen MP
<i>Shadow Assistant Treasurer</i>	<i>Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP</i>
<i>Shadow Minister for Competition and Productivity</i>	<i>Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP</i>
<i>Shadow Minister for Charities and Not-for-Profits</i>	<i>Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP</i>
<i>Shadow Minister for the Digital Economy</i>	<i>Ed Husic MP</i>
<i>Shadow Minister for Consumer Affairs</i>	<i>Tim Hammond MP</i>
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Treasury</i>	<i>Hon Matt Thistlethwaite MP</i>
Shadow Minister for Environment and Water	Hon Tony Burke MP
Shadow Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Australia	Hon Tony Burke MP
Shadow Minister for the Arts	Hon Tony Burke MP
<i>Manager of Opposition Business (House)</i>	<i>Hon Tony Burke MP</i>
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Australia</i>	<i>Senator the Hon Jacinta Collins</i>
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Citizenship and Multicultural Australia</i>	<i>Julie Owens MP</i>
Shadow Minister for Families and Social Services	Hon Jenny Macklin MP
<i>Shadow Minister for Housing and Homelessness</i>	<i>Senator the Hon Doug Cameron</i>
<i>Shadow Minister for Human Services</i>	<i>Hon Linda Burney MP</i>
<i>Shadow Minister for Disability and Carers</i>	<i>Senator Carol Brown</i>
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Families and Communities</i>	<i>Senator Louise Pratt</i>
Shadow Minister for Infrastructure, Transport, Cities and Regional Development	Hon Anthony Albanese MP
Shadow Minister for Tourism	Hon Anthony Albanese MP
<i>Shadow Minister for Regional Services, Territories and Local Government</i>	<i>Stephen Jones MP</i>
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Infrastructure</i>	<i>Pat Conroy MP</i>
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for External Territories</i>	<i>Hon Warren Snowdon MP</i>

Title	Shadow Minister
Shadow Attorney-General	Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP
Shadow Minister for National Security	Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP
Deputy Manager of Opposition Business in the House of Representatives	Hon Mark Dreyfus QC MP
Shadow Minister for Justice	Clare O'Neil MP
Shadow Minister for Employment and Workplace Relations	Hon Brendan O'Connor MP
Shadow Minister for Employment Services, Workforce Participation and Future of Work	Ed Husic MP
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Workplace Relations</i>	<i>Lisa Chesters MP</i>
Shadow Minister for Climate Change and Energy	Hon Mark Butler MP
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Climate Change</i>	<i>Pat Conroy MP</i>
Shadow Minister for Defence	Hon Richard Marles MP
Shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs	Hon Amanda Rishworth MP
Shadow Minister for Defence Personnel	Hon Amanda Rishworth MP
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for the Centenary of ANZAC</i>	<i>Hon Warren Snowdon MP</i>
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Cyber Security and Defence</i>	<i>Gai Brodtmann MP</i>
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Defence Industry and Support</i>	<i>Hon Mike Kelly AM MP</i>
Shadow Minister for Innovation, Industry, Science and Research	Senator the Hon Kim Carr
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Manufacturing and Science</i>	<i>Hon Nick Champion MP</i>
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Innovation</i>	<i>Senator Deborah O'Neill</i>
Shadow Minister for Health and Medicare	Hon Catherine King MP
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Medicare</i>	<i>Tony Zappia MP</i>
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Indigenous Health</i>	<i>Hon Warren Snowdon MP</i>
Shadow Minister for Early Childhood Education and Development⁽¹⁾	Hon Kate Ellis MP
Shadow Minister for TAFE and Vocational Education	Hon Kate Ellis MP
Shadow Minister for Skills and Apprenticeships	Senator the Hon Doug Cameron
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Early Childhood</i>	<i>Senator the Hon Jacinta Collins</i>
Shadow Minister for Agriculture, Fisheries and Forestry	Hon Joel Fitzgibbon MP
Shadow Minister for Rural and Regional Australia	Hon Joel Fitzgibbon MP
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Rural and Regional Australia</i>	<i>Lisa Chesters MP</i>
Shadow Minister for Resources and Northern Australia	Hon Jason Clare MP
Shadow Minister for Trade and Investment	Hon Jason Clare MP
Shadow Minister for Trade in Services	Hon Dr Andrew Leigh MP
Shadow Minister Assisting for Resources	Tim Hammond MP
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Northern Australia</i>	<i>Hon Warren Snowdon MP</i>
Shadow Minister for Immigration and Border Protection	Hon Shayne Neumann MP
Shadow Minister for Finance	Dr Jim Chalmers MP
Shadow Minister for Small Business and Financial Services⁽²⁾	Senator Katy Gallagher
Manager of Opposition Business in the Senate	Senator Katy Gallagher
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Small Business</i>	<i>Julie Owens MP</i>
Shadow Minister for Communications	Hon Michelle Rowland MP
Shadow Minister for Regional Communications	Stephen Jones MP
Shadow Minister for Ageing and Mental Health⁽³⁾	Hon Julie Collins MP
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Ageing</i>	<i>Senator Helen Polley</i>
<i>Shadow Assistant Minister for Mental Health</i>	<i>Senator Deborah O'Neill</i>

Each box represents a portfolio except for (1) which is in the Education portfolio, (2) which is in Treasury portfolio and (3) which is in the Health portfolio. **Shadow Cabinet Ministers are shown in bold type.**

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Monday, 27 February 2017

The SPEAKER (Hon. Tony Smith) took the chair at 10:00, made an acknowledgement of country and read prayers.

NOTICES

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (10:01): I give notice of my private member's bill to protect the penalty rates of Australians.

COMMITTEES

Petitions Committee

Report

Mr VASTA (Bonner) (10:01): I present the seventh report of the Standing Committee on Petitions for the 45th Parliament.

PETITIONS

Mr VASTA (Bonner) (10:01): I present the following nine petitions:

Sara Karimi Haghighi

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of: Clergy, staff and parishioners of the Anglican Parish of Christ Church South Yarra [Victoria] and other members of the Anglican Community in Australia and other members of the community Draws to the attention of the House: that the powers ceded to the Minister of Immigration and Border Protection (The Honourable Peter Dutton) by Section 417 of the Migration Act 1958 allow a permanent visa to be granted to: Name: Ms Sara KARIMI HAGHIGHI of South Yarra Vic (redacted personal information). Sara is a former Muslim who became a Christian in Australia, and was Baptised on 03 November 2013. If she is forced to return to Iran she will be charged with religious proselytizing and committing apostasy. Leaving Islam to embrace any other religion is a capital offense under Islamic law in Iran. She is a member of our church and a devout Christian seeing asylum for religious persecution in Iran.

We therefore aske the House to: recommend to the Minister of Immigration and Border Protection (The Honourable Peter Dutton) that a request has been received seeking his intervention has provided by Section 217 of the Migration Act 1958, and that the House support the request.

from 1 citizen

Helium Balloons

To the Honourable the Speaker and Members of the House of Representatives

This petition of concerned Australian citizens draws to the attention of the House: the impact that released balloons have on birds and marine wildlife in the waterways and oceans of Australia, and the depletion of helium gas. The majority of balloons are latex, hence they were not included in the Senate Inquiry into marine plastic pollution, yet they have a similar effect on marine wildlife. Plastic lips and streamers attached to balloons add to the threat. Helium is a non-renewable gas extracted from the Earth's crust, and vital to many medical and scientific uses. It should not be wasted on frivolous party or imprudent promotional or ceremonial balloon releases. Accidental release occurs far more easily when balloons are inflated with helium. Across Australia, many individuals, scientists, groups and local councils are trying to limit the litter and damage caused by balloons. When released, whole, burst or

remnant balloons can travel long distances on both atmospheric and/or ocean currents, across council and state borders, hence a national prohibition is required. While the marine plastic pollution problem is huge and diverse, the balloon pollution cause is singular and easily solved.

We therefore ask the House to do all in its power to: 1. Prohibit the release of any number of balloons, and 2. Prohibit the use of helium to inflate balloons in Australia
from 2284 citizens

Newstart

We draw the House's attention to the disincentive to find work represented by the effective tax rate for those on Newstart. If one is on the single rate of Newstart for 52 weeks in the year and earns between \$239.88 and \$444.99 per week every week, they are losing 79 cents in the dollar. This consists of 50 cents lost Newstart, 19 cents income tax and 10 cents Medicare levy. After the first \$119 per week they are losing at least 69 cents per dollar until Newstart payments are reduced to zero.

Change the taper rate for Newstart and similar payments to be 25 cents in the dollar and the phase in rate for Medicare to be no more than 4 cents in the dollar, resulting in less than 50 cents effective tax in many cases. This may require the taper to kick in from the first dollar for Newstart to be fair to the taxpayer.

from 66 citizens

Parental Leave

Due to inadequate legal protections for high income employees on parental leave employers are targeting them for dismissal.

Greater legal protection from unfair dismissal, general protections . for employees on parental leave, regardless of income or gender.

from 15 citizens

Former Member Entitlements

It is accepted that once you are no longer employed for a role that you no longer receive any payments from that employer that should extend to ALL Australians, including members of Parliament. I have received 197,831 supporters from a Change.org petition (<https://www.change.org/p/house-of-representatives-stop-payments-for-non-currently-serving-politicians>) only I have been told the format is incorrect. This will replace that petition.

I seek to have removed ALL payments being paid to ALL past Members of Parliament. Once they no longer hold their seat, they shall no longer be entitled to ANY payment from the Federal Government.

from 8356 citizens

Data matching compliance

Requesting that the House Suspend the data matching compliance system due to the reported errors with the system. Not all the debts have been proven nor have customers received the original review notifications. Compliance issues only being able to be dealt with online due to no other method available. That due to issues with the online customer portal accessing accounts has been made difficult. A loss of faith in the processes employed by government agencies. Charging customers interest on debts due when a clear and fair process has not been implemented.

We therefore ask the House to consider each of the reasons carefully and understand that the impact this is having on the citizens of Australia. Due to the large amount of claims Centrelink has to deal with that the customer has a clear process for having that decision reviewed according to law. To suspend all automation of the notifications and investigate any errors in the system.

from 1019 citizens

Pensions

That, in light of the current controversy regarding 'welfare bludgers' and their tiny incomes, current and former Members of Parliament rescind their rights to excessive retirement pensions and benefits and apply for pension support from Centrelink in retirement in line with the majority of Australians

We therefore ask the House to act against its own best interests to rescind Parliamentary pensions and to financially align them with those of the large majority of ageing Australians who barely manage to survive week-to-week. We also ask the House to consider that an individual's election to Parliament is just "another job", and as such should not be subject to "eminent privilege", given that so few Parliamentarians are actually "better" than the rest of us and are indeed, common people.

from 770 citizens

Refugees

This petition from Rural Australians for Refugees and Certain Citizens of Australia, draws to the attention of the House, the deplorable treatment of refugees seeking asylum in Australia.

We therefore ask the House to: 1. Immediately close onshore and offshore detention centres, and bring people seeking asylum at offshore detention centres to the mainland where all asylum claims will be heard in a timely manner and with justice and compassion. 2. Reinstate into the Migration Zone the Australian mainland and all other Australian territories that have been excised from Australia's Migration Zone. 3. Permanently resettle in Australia people who have sought asylum in Australia, who arrived by boat without authorization, and are found to be refugees under the UN Refugee Convention. 4. Permit the right to apply for family reunion once people are recognized as refugees, with family reunions achieved in a timely manner. 5. Increase intake of refugees on the humanitarian visa to 50,000 per year. 6. Exercise a duty of care to ensure that people seeking asylum are not pressured to sign documents to return to their home countries against their will when they have a genuine fear of persecution and death.

from 157 citizens

Returned Services Entitlements

Requesting that returned service men & women are entitled to government housing when receiving veterans pension as at this point they have no entitlement

So many of these men and women have given so much for this country they should automatically be eligible for housing we the people ask that the house do all they can to fix this issue and adjust housing eligibility for veterans

from 306 citizens

Petitions received.

PETITIONS

Responses

Mr VASTA (Bonner) (10:01): I present the following 11 ministerial responses to petitions previously presented:

Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse

Dear Mr Vasta

I refer to a letter from your predecessor, Dr Dennis Jensen MP, dated 5 May 2016 to the Attorney-General regarding a petition submitted by Mr Vincent Alexander Charles Tough to the Standing

Committee on Petitions (#1144/1651). The letter was referred to the Prime Minister and he has asked me to reply on his behalf. I regret the delay in responding.

Last week on Friday 4 November 2016, the Minister for Social Services, the Hon Christian Porter MP, announced the Commonwealth Government would establish a redress scheme for survivors of child sexual abuse in Commonwealth institutional settings. The Minister also announced an independent advisory council would support the Government's *design* and implementation of the scheme. The council will bring together a broad group of specialists, including survivor groups, legal and psychological experts.

If he hasn't already, Mr Tough may wish to make a submission to the Royal Commission into Institutional Responses to Child Sexual Abuse, via www.childabuseroyalcommission.gov.au.

from the **Assistant Minister to the Prime Minister, Senator McGrath**

Department of Human Services: Service Centres

Dear Mr Vasta

Thank you for your letter of 12 October 2016 seeking my response to a petition raised by residents in the Electorate of Shortland on the decision to consolidate Service Centres in New South Wales.

The Government is committed to offering more one-stop-shops for Department of Human Services' (the Department) customers. Since 2009, over 200 one-stop shops have been established to offer both Medicare and Centrelink services from the one location, providing convenient, easy-to-access, coordinated services from a single point.

As property leases come up for renewal, the Department takes the opportunity to review service options to ensure the service delivering setting is meeting the needs of the community and achieving the best outcomes for taxpayer resources.

Before any services are brought together, the Department assesses the need and location for a service centre operating as a One-Stop Shop and considers many factors including;

- customer amenities
- availability and flexibility of accommodation
- demand for services in the community
- proximity of existing portfolio sites
- access to services through other channels
- capacity at each site
- local knowledge; and
- property commitments.

The Department engages with the local community for any changes to service delivery via community groups, local providers, direct customer contact, in-house communication products and local media.

As part of the community consultation for the Belmont Service Centre, federal and state members of parliament and local council representatives were contacted to communicate upcoming changes to service delivery arrangements. Staff from the Belmont and Charlestown Service Centres also embarked on an intensive community engagement strategy to communicate the change to local community and stakeholders.

The Belmont Service Centre was offering Medicare Services with limited Centrelink services. Since Co-location, the Charlestown Service Centre offers the full suite of both Medicare and Centrelink face to face services to the community.

The Charlestown Service Centre is located near two shopping centres, provides convenient car parking and public transport options for customers, including those travelling from Belmont, with the bus stop 500m from the Service Centre. The Department is also co-located with the National Disability Insurance Agency (NDIA) at Hilltop Plaza across the road from the Charlestown Service Centre, with this site also providing a full range of Medicare services.

The Department gives customers a variety of options when managing Medicare claims and Centrelink business. The Charlestown Service Centre has expert staff to serve customers face-to-face and help them access self-service facilities to manage their business online.

Residents in and around Belmont, and across Australia, can also choose to access Medicare services without having to visit an office. The easiest way to claim a Medicare rebate is at the doctor's. Nationally, more than 96 per cent of all Medicare claims are lodged digitally, the majority at the point of service. A range of Medicare services can also be accessed through the internet. For claims that are lodged online, the benefit is paid into the claimant's nominated bank account usually on the same business day.

The Department also has a number of smart phone applications to assist people to conveniently conduct their business. Information about the Medicare Express Plus App, as well as how to register for Online Services through the myGov portal, is available on the Department's website at www.humanservices.gov.au/selfservice.

Centrelink services are also available through the myGov portal which can be found at: <http://www.humanservices.gov.au/customer/subjects/self-service>.

from the **Minister for Human Services, Mr Tudge**

Persecution of Christians in the Middle East

Dear Mr Vasta

Thank you for your correspondence of 12 October 2016 enclosing Petition 1167/1676, concerning persecuted Christians in the Middle East. I note that this petition has also been referred to the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Hon Julie Bishop MP, to respond to matters that relate to her portfolio.

A total of 12,000 humanitarian places have been made available on a one-off basis for people displaced by conflicts in Syria and Iraq. These places are in addition to Australia's 2016-17 Humanitarian Programme, which includes a substantial number of places for people displaced by conflicts in the Middle East. Priority for these places is being given to refugees who are assessed as being most vulnerable (that is, women, children and families) and to those located in Lebanon, Jordan and Turkey. A significant proportion of these visas are expected to be granted to people from minority ethnic and religious communities, many of whom are Christians.

Additionally, the Australian Government has committed to increasing the size of the Humanitarian Programme, from the current level of 13,750 places to 18,750 by 2018-19. This will allow many more people in humanitarian need, including persecuted minority groups from the Middle East, to resettle in Australia.

The focus of Australia's Humanitarian Programme is for refugees and other people who have fled their country of usual residence. Australia's ability to assist people still living in their home country is limited, and few in-country applications are granted each year. People granted under this category are generally brought to the attention of the Government by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

Churches and faith-based communities are able to propose vulnerable families for resettlement in Australia. The Community Proposal Pilot and Special Humanitarian Programme pathways under the Humanitarian Programme provide a mechanism for communities in regional areas to identify and support individuals in humanitarian situations for resettlement.

Thank you for bringing this petition to my attention.

from the **Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, Mr Dutton**

Andrew Watt Family Permanent Residence

Dear Mr Vasta

Thank you for your correspondence of 12 October 2016 enclosing Petition PN0002, concerning a permanent residence application for Mr Andrew Watt's family. Your correspondence has been referred to me as the Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, as the matter raised falls within my portfolio responsibilities.

In accordance with the Privacy Act 1988, it would be inappropriate to discuss the details of an individual's immigration status with unauthorised parties.

However, I can advise that a decision has been made on the permanent visa applications of Mr Watt's wife and sister-in-law, and that they have been notified of the outcome.

Thank you for bringing this petition to my attention.

from the **Assistant Minister for Immigration and Border Protection, Mr Hawke**

Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme: Access to pembrolizumab

Dear Mr Vasta

Thank you for your letter of 20 October 2016, offering me the opportunity to respond to a petition presented in the House on 17 October 2016, regarding access to pembrolizumab (Keytruda®) through the Pharmaceutical Benefits Scheme (PBS) for the treatment of mesothelioma.

I can advise that currently pembrolizumab cannot be marketed in Australia or PBS subsidised for the treatment of mesothelioma. However, I understand that there is some preliminary data that indicates that pembrolizumab might be useful in the treatment of mesothelioma and my Department has been liaising with the sponsor of this medicine, Merck Sharp & Dohme Australia Pty Ltd (MSD) regarding this.

The Therapeutic Goods Administration (TGA) has approved pembrolizumab as a treatment for melanoma in certain patients, but not for the treatment of mesothelioma or other diseases. The TGA evaluates new medicines proposed for commercial supply in Australia in terms of their quality, safety and clinical effectiveness. In order to register a new medicine on the Australian Register of Therapeutic Goods for marketing in Australia, a sponsor must make a submission to the TGA along with supporting data. The sponsor's submission will set out which patient group the medicine is claimed to benefit and the evidence for its safety and effectiveness in this patient group. This ensures that the medicine is approved and safe for use in Australia for its TGA registered use or uses.

At present, pembrolizumab is only listed on the PBS for the treatment of melanoma in certain patients. A drug cannot be listed on the PBS for treating a particular medical condition unless it is recommended by the Pharmaceutical Benefits Advisory Committee (PBAC), an independent expert body. When considering each submission, the PBAC reviews the available evidence in relation to the clinical effectiveness, safety and value for money for treatment of the condition.

The PBAC's recommendation for this listing was based on the request made by MSD and the evidence contained in its listing submission. The PBAC considered an additional submission for pembrolizumab for the treatment of non-small cell lung cancer at its meeting in early November 2016. The outcomes of that meeting will be made public on 16 December 2016.

When MSD considers that it has gathered sufficient evidence to support submissions for TGA registration and PBS subsidy for pembrolizumab for mesothelioma, it would be open to it to make concurrent submissions to the TGA and the PBAC under parallel processing arrangements.

Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention.

from the **Minister for Health and Aged Care, Ms Ley**

Cost of Private Health Insurance

Dear Mr Vasta

Thank you for your advice of 20 October 2016 regarding petition number PN0012 that relates to the cost of private health insurance submitted by Mr Richard Wilson of Urangan.

As I advised in my letter to Mr Wilson of 20 April 2016, some consumers may have premium increases above or below the approved industry average. The increases are applied unilaterally and are not age related.

I note that the petition calls upon the Government to set a maximum premium increase to those policies that are unchanged from the previous year. However, as the cost pressures from items such as the higher costs of treatment and services and the increased utilisation of privately insured treatment are variable, it would not be feasible to instigate a capped premium system.

Nevertheless, the petitioners may rest assured that all requests for premium increases are individually scrutinised by the Australian Regulation Prudential Authority and my Department to ensure that the amount sought represents the lowest increase possible while still allowing the continued sustainability of the insurer.

Finally, it is the Government's view that the conducting of a premium review on an annual basis is sufficient to achieve the above goal and random audit checks are therefore not necessary.

Thank you for bringing this matter to my attention.

from the **Minister for Health and Aged Care, Ms Ley**

Mobile Black Spots: Funding to improve

Dear Mr Vasta

Thank you for your letter of 23 November 2016 to Senator the Hon Mitch Fifield, Minister for Communications and the Arts regarding a petition (PN0023) asking the Government to consider further funding for the improvement of mobile phone black spots and commit to a deadline by which all identified mobile black spots will receive mobile coverage. Your letter has been referred to me as the matter falls under my responsibility as Minister for Regional Communications.

I note the concerns raised by Ms Katherine Marsh regarding mobile phone coverage and the implications of being unable to contact emergency services via a mobile phone in a mobile black spot area. I also acknowledge the petition initiated by Ms Marsh, presented in the House of Representatives by the Member for O'Connor, and the organisations and people who have provided their support. The experience described by Ms Marsh in her correspondence clearly demonstrates the importance of mobile phone coverage, particularly in regional Australia.

While mobile carriers claim to provide coverage to 99 per cent of Australia's population, there are still many parts of Australia where there is no coverage, particularly in regional and remote locations. Expanding mobile coverage has clear economic and social benefits, as well as public safety benefits for people living, working and travelling in regional and remote areas of Australia.

This is why the Australian Government has committed \$220 million through the Mobile Black Spot Program to invest in telecommunications infrastructure to address mobile black spots along major regional transport routes, in small communities and in locations prone to experiencing natural disasters.

The program has also been highly successful in maximising co-contributions from third parties, including state and local governments and local communities. Together rounds 1 and 2 are delivering almost \$600 million in new investment towards improving mobile coverage in regional and remote Australia.

Under rounds 1 and 2 of the program, 765 new or upgraded mobile base stations will be deployed across regional and remote Australia — 114 Optus, 577 Telstra and 74 Vodafone base stations. Nationally, the funded base stations will provide new and upgraded handheld coverage to 86 300 square kilometres and new external antenna coverage to over 202 300 square kilometres of regional and remote Australia. In addition, over 7 600 kilometres of major regional transport routes will receive new handheld or external antenna coverage. Indicative rollout schedules for round 1 can be found on the carriers' websites and will be regularly updated as the rollout progresses. The carriers will release indicative round 2 rollout schedules shortly.

While mobile phones enable individuals to call the Emergency Call Service from most places in Australia, given the size and geography of the Australian continent, there will always be areas without mobile coverage. Even in areas of coverage, local factors including terrain such as hills and foliage, and the type of mobile handset or device being used can impact mobile reception.

As part of effective emergency preparation and planning, it is strongly recommended that people do not rely on a single form of communication or source of information in the event of an emergency. Even in areas where mobile coverage is available, despite best planning and preparation, any communication system can be affected by adverse and/or varying conditions. It is important to realise that if living, working or travelling in areas where there is poor or no mobile coverage alternative devices, such as low cost satellite personal location beacons (PLBs) and/or satellite phones, should be considered. These devices are readily available from a number of providers and can operate across the entire Australian landmass.

The Government is committed to educating the public and providing information on emergency call services. The Attorney-General's Department runs the Triple Zero website at www.triplezero.gov.au and this is the primary source of information to the public. I note that the Triple Zero website already contains information to inform the public that if there is no mobile coverage from any network in the area they are trying to call from, then they will be unable to reach the Emergency Call Service by mobile phone. The Department of Communications and the Arts website at www.communications.gov.au/what-we-do/phone/emergency-call-services and the Australian Communications and Media Authority website at www.acma.gov.au/Citizen/Phones/Mobile/Emergency-calls-from-mobiles also provide complementary information.

Further information about the Mobile Black Spot Program is available on the Department's website at www.communications.gov.au/mobile_coverage.

from the **Minister for Regional Communications, Senator Nash**

National Capital Plan: Amendment to replace West Basin Precinct Code

Dear Mr Vasta

Thank you for your letter of 23 November 2016 regarding Petition No. PN0028. I understand that the petition seeks an amendment of the National Capital Plan to replace the existing West Basin Precinct Code with revised code that re-establishes Acton Park in West Basin.

The National Capital Plan (the Plan) is a legislative instrument prepared by National Capital Authority (NCA) and approved by the Parliament under the *Australian Capital Territory (Planning and Land Management) Act 1988* (the PALM Act).

The process for amending the Plan is described in the PALM Act. It involves preparation of a draft Amendment by the NCA, thorough public consultation and the approval of the final Amendment by the responsible Minister. The amended Plan is then tabled in both Houses of Parliament as a disallowable instrument. Through this process the Parliament is afforded the opportunity to scrutinise the policies that guide the character and quality of Australia's National Capital.

The provisions that this petition seeks to amend were subject to peer review, extensive public consultation and consideration by the relevant Minister and the Parliament in 2006 and again in 2016.

The West Basin Precinct Code is based on the research and investigation by the NCA into the character of the National Capital. The work builds on the legacy of Walter Burley Griffin and includes protections for the heritage values of West Basin. The Griffins' plans for Canberra envisaged a range of different relationships between the city, its landscape and the lake. The Griffins intended that some locations would provide a very direct and intimate relationship between urban areas and the lake, whilst in other areas they imagined a parkland setting.

The West Basin waterfront extends for less than 800 metres of Lake Burley Griffin's 40.5 kilometre shoreline. In any future development at West Basin, the NCA will require continuous public access around the West Basin lakeshore, including a waterfront promenade of a minimum 55 metres in width.

Thank you for bringing this petition to my attention.

from the **Minister for Local Government and Territories, Senator Nash**

Halal certification

Dear Mr Vasta

Thank you for your letter of 1 December 2016 regarding a petition on halal certification presented in the House of Representatives by the Member for Dawson, Mr George Christensen MP on 29 November 2016. I apologise for the delay in responding.

I have reviewed the petition and believe that any legal or policy adjustments are best considered in the context of the government response to the Senate Economics References Committee's inquiry into third party certification of food, which I anticipate being tabled in the Senate in early 2017.

I am aware that a number of Australians are concerned about the practice of halal certification in Australia and would like to affirm that the government respects the religious needs of all community sectors, including those of the Islamic faith. Australia has a well-earned reputation as one of the most successful and cohesive multicultural societies in the world today. This success is based on respect for one another's human rights, the law and core values. Australia's approach to cultural diversity recognises that our multicultural character gives us a competitive edge in an increasingly globalised world.

I note the petition calls for goods subject to halal certification to be clearly marked. Food safety is the overarching principle for guiding decisions about food labelling regulation in Australia. This ensures consumers have access to sufficient information to enable them to make informed choices about the safety and nutritional quality of the food they purchase. The decision by a food company to obtain, display or pay for halal certification is a voluntary commercial decision and does not alter the safety of the food. Food businesses such as local butchers are also able to market meat from animals that have not been slaughtered in compliance with religious requirements, in line with consumer preferences. Evidence received by the Senate Committee as part of the inquiry also overwhelmingly suggested that halal certification does not result in increased food prices.

The Australian Government only has a role in halal certification for red meat and red meat products for export—a trade which is valued in excess of \$1 billion. Currently 22 Islamic Organisations are approved by the Department of Agriculture and Water Resources to perform this certification, which supports market access of Australian red meat to export markets that require halal certification, such as Indonesia and Malaysia. These are significant markets for the meat industry and meeting their requirements is instrumental in providing exporters access to these markets, which allows our exports to continue to grow and increase returns to the farm gate.

I also note the petition calls for no discrimination on gender or religious grounds to be practiced in Australian workplaces, unless the employer is a recognised religious organisation. The *Fair Work Act*

2009, the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* and the *Sex Discrimination Act 1984* already provide protections against unlawful discrimination and provide avenues for redress to be sought. The role of Department of Agriculture and Water Resources role in export abattoirs is limited to the employment of government officers for animal health and food safety purposes and all Australian Public Service employees are employed in accordance with the *Public Service Act 1999*, which also sets out protections against unlawful discrimination.

I understand that when the Standing Committee on Petitions has considered this response it will be presented in the House and be posted on the Committee's website.

Thank you for bringing this petition to my attention. I trust this information will be of assistance to you.

from the **Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, Mr Joyce**

Cashless Debit Card

Dear Mr Vasta

Thank you for your letter of 23 November 2016 advising that the Standing Committee on Petitions has received a petition (petition number EN0037) in relation to the Cashless Debit Card (CDC).

The CDC is trialling a different way to deliver welfare payments that seeks to reduce the significant social harm in communities caused by welfare-fuelled gambling, alcohol and drug abuse. Limiting the amount of cash available to pay for these products aims to promote human rights, including the rights of children by assisting participants to use their welfare payments to purchase food and other necessities for their children.

The Ceduna and East Kimberley trial sites were chosen based on a range of factors, including strong community interest and support, high welfare dependence and high social harm indicators. After extensive co-design with leaders and people of Ceduna, the Australian Government signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the local Ceduna community leaders in August 2015.

The Government has worked extensively with communities on the ground to co-design the parameters of the trial. To support the implementation of the trial, the Government has invested over \$1 million in each trial site for additional support services including drug and alcohol services, 24/7 mobile outreach, mental health services, family support services and financial counselling services. The Department of Social Services (DSS) continues to work closely with the leaders and the community in the trial sites and is monitoring the trial closely.

The CDC is provided by Indue, an Authorised Deposit-Taking institution. CDC accounts are fee-free and trial participants do not incur any associated bank fees. While merchants can impose fees when using EFTPOS which apply regardless of the type of card used, as far as possible the Government has worked with merchants in the trial sites to have EFTPOS fees removed for recipients using the CDC. More information about CDC accounts, including the Conditions of Use, is available on the Indue website at indue.com.au/dctl.

In October 2016, the Government released the CDC Trial Progress Report outlining the key results for the first six months of the CDC trial. For example, in Ceduna, poker machine revenue for the region was 15.1 per cent lower between April 2016 and August 2016 than for the equivalent period in 2015. Monthly apprehensions under the Public Intoxication Act 1984 (SA) were 54 per cent lower between March 2016 and June 2016 compared to the same period in 2015.

The CDC Trial Progress Report and media release can be accessed at www.mhs.gov.au/media-releases/2016-10-31-joint-media-release-cashless-debit-card-trial-half-way-point-and-communities-are-seeing.

There will be a full independent evaluation of the trial, which will inform decisions by the Government about the future of the CDC beyond the current trials.

Thank you again for raising this matter with me.
from the **Minister for Human Services, Mr Tudge**

Gambling: Prevention of Advertising

Dear Mr Vasta

Thank you for your letter of 23 November 2016 to the Attorney-General, Senator the Hon George Brandis QC, concerning a petition requesting legislation be introduced to prevent gambling advertising. As the matter raised falls within my portfolio responsibility, your letter has been forwarded to me for reply.

The Australian Government believes it is important to ensure that advertising for gambling services is presented in a responsible manner. I note that the petitioners' proposal is intended to benefit the community in general, however television broadcasters are already subject to significant restrictions on when gambling advertisements can be scheduled and the content of these advertisements. These protections aim to strike a balance between legitimate commercial interests and appropriate community safeguards.

Broadcasting services

Broadcasting services are provided under a co-regulatory legal system established by Parliament where the *Broadcasting Services Act 1992* sets an overarching framework for the delivery of broadcasting services but where specific rules relating to program standards are set by broadcasting sectors in consultation with the public and the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). This recognises the importance of ensuring that television content reflects community standards and provides a means by which the community can formally express its views to broadcasters.

Rules relating to the classification, placement and amount of advertising are set out in industry codes of practice. The ACMA registers codes once it is satisfied that broadcasters have undertaken public consultation and the codes contain appropriate community safeguards. Neither the Government nor my Department have any formal role in the code review and registration process. My Department has provided your petition to the ACMA for their consideration in future code-making processes.

Existing restrictions on gambling advertisements - general

On 10 November 2015, the ACMA registered a revised Commercial Television Industry Code of Practice which took effect from 1 December 2015.

The revised code provides that gambling advertisements may not be shown during:

- G (General), P (Pre-school) or C (Children) rated programs broadcast between 6.00 am and 8.30 am, or 4.00 pm and 7.00 pm
- any program that is broadcast between 5.00 am and 8.30 pm and which is principally directed at children.

These prohibitions do not apply to advertisements broadcast in a news, current affairs or sporting program during those time periods. They also do not apply to advertisements relating to such things as lottery, keno or contests, or to advertisements for entertainment or dining facilities where gambling may take place.

The Subscription Broadcast Television Industry Codes of Practice 2013 requires subscription broadcasters to take into account the intellectual and emotional maturity of the audience when scheduling advertisements relating to betting or gambling.

Existing restrictions on promotion of odds and gambling advertisements — during a live sporting event

In 2013 rules regulating the promotion of betting odds and betting advertisements in connection with a live sporting event were introduced into the commercial television, subscription television and commercial radio codes of practice.

During live sports broadcasts, the rules:

- prohibit the promotion of betting odds from the start until the end of play (there are limited exceptions including for the broadcast of multi-day sports and overseas live sport);
- prohibit commentators from promoting betting odds during play, and for 30 minutes before and 30 minutes after the game;
- restrict generic gambling advertisements to before and after play, scheduled breaks in play and when play is suspended;
- require gambling representatives to be clearly identified at all times;
- prohibit gambling advertising that involves a gambling representative at or around, or appearing to be at or around, the ground at any time; and
- prohibit gambling representatives appearing as part, or a guest, of the commentary team at any time.

Commercials relating to betting or gambling or a promotion of odds during live sporting events must conclude with a responsible gambling message.

Broadcast complaints process

The codes include procedures for dealing with complaints. In the first instance, complaints about matters covered by a code must be submitted in writing or by electronic complaints form to the relevant broadcaster within 30 days of the broadcast at issue.

For commercial free-to-air television services, the Free TV Australia website provides access to the electronic complaints form at www.freetv.com.au/Content_Common/OnlineComplaintStep1.aspx.

For commercial radio services, information about procedures for dealing with complaints is available from the website of peak industry body Commercial Radio Australia (CRA) at www.commercialradio.com.au/legal/complaints.

Complaints handling procedures that apply to subscription television broadcasters are set out in the Subscription Television Codes of Practice 2013, which are available from the website of the peak industry body, the Australian Subscription Television and Radio Association (ASTRA) at www.astra.org.au/advocacy/codes-of-practice.

If a complaint is not answered within 60 days of being received, or to the complainant's satisfaction, the complainant may then refer the matter to ACMA. If the ACMA finds there has been a breach of a code, it may take action against the relevant broadcaster, such as imposing an additional licence condition on the broadcaster to comply with the relevant code, or obtaining an enforceable undertaking from them about their activities.

More information is available on the ACMA website at www.acma.gov.au/Citizen/Take-action/Complaints/Broadcast-complaints/ or by writing to:

Assistant Manager
Investigations Section
Australian Communications & Media Authority
PO Box Q500
QUEEN VICTORIA BUILDING NSW 1230

Other regulatory arrangements

In relation to gambling advertisements at sporting grounds and on sporting apparel, these are matters for each State and Territory. Most of these jurisdictions place requirements on the content of advertisements, such as requiring that advertising is accurate and does not mislead or deceive and ensuring advertisements are not targeted at vulnerable audiences such as children. All States and Territories require that all advertising for gambling services is accompanied by appropriate harm minimisation messages such as to gamble responsibly.

Advertising self-regulation

Complaints about the content of gambling advertisements, including advertising at sporting events, can be directed in writing to the Advertising Standards Bureau (ASB), for consideration by the Advertising Standards Board (the Board). The ASB administers self-regulatory codes of practice developed by the Australian Association of National Advertisers (AANA), including the Advertiser Code of Ethics.

The Advertiser Code of Ethics applies to most advertising including outdoor media, and contains a range of provisions relating to taste and decency and is intended to reflect community values and expectations. The Advertiser Code of Ethics provides the basis for members of the public to make complaints about advertising. Once the ASB has received a complaint, it assesses the complaint to determine whether it is eligible for consideration by the Board.

The Board is comprised of members of the general community who are independent of the advertising industry and come from a range of age groups and backgrounds.

In relation to gambling advertising, while the Board cannot look at the placement or frequency of advertisements, it can look at the messages shown in an advertisement. The Board has indicated that in the past it has found that advertisements encouraging excessive gambling, or that may make gambling attractive to children, breach the Advertiser Code of Ethics on the grounds that they go against prevailing community standards. Examples of cases that have been considered under the Advertiser Code of Ethics can be found on the ASB's website at www.adstandards.com.au/products-issues/gambling-advertising.

The AANA has also recently concluded the Wagering Advertising and Marketing Communications Code which sets out a range of code provisions for the content of wagering advertisements. These include that wagering advertisements must not be directed to or depict minors, or persons between the ages of 18-24.

Wagering advertisements must also not portray, condone or encourage:

- wagering in combination with the drinking of alcohol;
- participation in wagering activities as a means of relieving financial or personal difficulties;
- participation in excessive wagering activities; or
- peer pressure to participate in wagering activities nor disparage abstention from wagering.

When a complaint is upheld and it is determined that a breach of an AANA code has occurred, the advertiser is notified of the decision and provided with a draft case report. The advertiser then has the opportunity to respond to the Board's decision. In concluding this complaint handling process, the Board's decision and the final case report, incorporating the advertiser's response, is then provided to the complainants and the public.

Thank you for bringing this petition to my attention. I trust this information will be of assistance in responding to the petitioners.

from the **Minister for Communications, Senator Fifield**

PETITIONS

Statements

Mr VASTA (Bonner) (10:01): Of the nine petitions I have tabled today, seven have been lodged through the electronic petitioning system. These seven electronic petitions received 10,689 electronic signatures overall. The largest number of signatures to one e-petition tabled today was 8,356. These large numbers of signatures demonstrates the ease in which principal petitioners are able to gather signatures electronically using the House's e-petitions system. I will update the House regularly on the use of the e-petitions system.

COMMITTEES

Environment and Energy Committee

Report

Mr BROAD (Mallee) (10:02): On behalf of the Standing Committee on the Environment and Energy, I present the committee's report, entitled *Living with fruit bats: inquiry into flying fox management in the eastern states*, together with the minutes of proceedings.

The flying foxes are an important part of the Australian environment, and it was brought to our attention, as the House of Representatives environment committee, that we should do an inquiry because increasingly there is a tension between what is a native animal and urban populations. For some reason—we still are not sure why—flying foxes are increasingly attracted to urban areas. That may be a result of the native vegetation that is being planted in those urban areas, having the consequence that it has caused a lot of hardship for a lot of Australians who are living with flying foxes, living with fruit bats.

But it was our view in the environment committee that we needed to find a way forward and create a framework in order for people to be able to interact with a very important species. The flying foxes play an integral part in the pollination of so many native species. We held a roundtable, and it was a very constructive roundtable with the environment committee. That roundtable allowed communities to express their concern about the challenges they have had with flying foxes, it allowed experts to talk about the lack of funding they have had to be able to really put some quantifiable data around the number of flying foxes and whether the species are increasing or decreasing and it allowed us as committee members to gain an insight into something that some of us have individual experience with in our own electorates but some of us do not. In the electorate of Mallee, I do not have a lot of flying foxes, but in some of the coastal regions and in many other parts of Australia flying foxes are a significant part of the ecosystem.

It needs to be said that the limited information is because of the life expectancy of flying foxes and the movement of the flying fox. The sheer distance that a flying fox can travel over a 24-hour period makes it very hard to put that quantifiable data towards it, and one of the decisions of the committee was that there needs to be more funding in order for us to make sure that whatever decisions we as Australians make about that interaction between humans and our native species are made from a science based approach so that we can ensure we have a good outcome.

Also we felt that there needed to be an establishment of a cooperative body. Local councils become the first line of defence when you have a significant incursion of flying foxes into that

community. Of course people feel that they are inundated and, when there is not that quantifiable data, it then becomes very hard for that local council to be the first responder and to know what should and should not be done. There are some local councils who have had some very good experiences with flying foxes, and one of the recommendations we made is about ensuring that that experience can be shared so that communities can learn from other communities. There is a time when flying foxes do need to have their nests disturbed and perhaps be moved on, but it needs to be a level of process whereby the councils who are working through can know whether this is a small incidence or whether this is a significant issue that is going to have negative consequences on their community.

I want to thank my committee members for their openness. Certainly this committee inquiry was brought on by the minister for the environment, Josh Frydenberg, who said this was an issue. It was also brought on by the member for Hunter, who asked us to look into this. I want to thank those who gave up their time. The report has a lot of recommendations that I would encourage people to read through. It is talking about how we can best ensure we do quantifiable data so that we can best ensure we have a process. This is so that, if there is a small incursion, the community knows that this is just a small incursion and they can live with that and they can understand the species; and, if there is a significant, bigger incursion, to the point that it is having negative consequences on the everyday lives of Australians, that there is some freedom for the minister to be able to allow the council to intervene.

I think the report hopefully will provide some depth and process for future ministers, for future councils and for future state councils to ensure that any interaction with this very important species, a species which is important to Australia's native flora and fauna, is a positive one, not a negative one. Thank you.

Mr CONROY (Shortland) (10:08): I want to echo the sentiments of the committee chair, the member for Mallee, in his excellent speech. It is an important topic. One of the key driving forces, besides the referral from the minister for the environment, was the real community agitation we have seen on this issue. It has been particularly noticeable in my local area of Lake Macquarie and the Hunter Valley. I want to acknowledge that the key driving force for this inquiry's establishment was the member for Hunter. So I am glad he is in the chamber. He has been very vocal on the impact this has had on communities in our area, whether it is Singleton up the valley or Blackalls Park right on Lake Macquarie.

It is an issue where we need to acknowledge the key role that flying foxes have in our environment in terms of biodiversity and as a key pollinator for our flora. But we also need to acknowledge the huge negative impact that urban settlements of these animals have on these communities—people not able to go outside, heightened levels of asthma, destruction of cars, issues with kids going to school.

So we need to find a solution, and this report goes some way towards finding that solution by pointing out two key things. Firstly, more research is needed. We do not even have true base levels for the populations of these flying foxes, so we cannot tell whether the populations have rebounded because of their listing as endangered. How can we remove them from those listings if we do not know what the population truly is? Secondly, much more research is needed into mitigation. What are the most effective ways of dealing with this issue before we take the very drastic step of completely moving a flying fox camp?

The round table that the committee held was particularly valuable in driving forth the point that councils need more information. Councils are often very poorly resourced, but they bear the brunt of dealing with this issue, so I think the key recommendation from this report besides more research being needed is to give councils more tools in their armoury for how to deal with this and support local communities so that the knee-jerk response of just destroying the camp is not the first response. It may be part of the response, but it should not be the first response, and councils need to know that there are other options.

I commend this report to the House. I thank the secretariat for their excellent work. I thank everyone who made submissions, and I thank the member for Hunter, again, for really being the driving force in cooperation with the Minister for the Environment and Energy.

Mr BROAD (Mallee) (10:11): I move:

That the House take note of the report.

The SPEAKER: In accordance with standing order 39, the debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Reference to Federation Chamber

Mr BROAD (Mallee) (10:11): I move:

That the order of the day be referred to the Federation Chamber for debate.

Question agreed to.

BILLS

Parliamentary Entitlements Amendment (Ending the Rorts) Bill 2017

First Reading

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

Bill read a first time.

Second Reading

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (10:12): I move:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Regrettably, there are some constants in this place. One of the constants is the widespread misuse of parliamentary allowances by members of the House of Representatives and by senators. Another constant is that, when there have been episodes exposed, normally in the media, the government's response has tended to be reactionary and tended to be minimalist.

I will spare honourable members a long list of examples of the sorts of misuse that we have seen in recent years, but this morning just a very, very quick internet search threw up a number which would remind people of the problem. For example, in 2013, the late member for Canning got himself into strife when it was discovered that he had claimed travel and accommodation for him and his wife to fly from Perth to Cairns, about a \$2,388 claim on the public taxpayer, and about a week after that trip his register of interests was updated to show that he had bought an investment property in Cairns.

More recently, in mid-2015, we had all of the exposes about members of parliament going to various weddings. We had former Speaker Bronwyn Bishop, who had claimed to go to Sophie Mirabella's wedding, near Albury. Senator George Brandis paid money back after it was exposed that he had attended the wedding of shock jock Michael Smith. The current

member for Cook and Treasurer and the current member for New England, the Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources, both paid money back for attending weddings. The member for Warringah also went to Sophie Mirabella's wedding on the public tab, and the member for Warringah also went to the former Speaker Peter Slipper's wedding on the public tab. Admittedly some of those have been paid back—although not all, I understand—but they were only paid back when the episodes were exposed in the media.

The current Manager of Government Business, Christopher Pyne, was exposed in late 2015 as having claimed \$5,000 to take his family to Sydney for a week for official duties, apparently, between Christmas and New Year's Eve. The Manager of Opposition Business—no side of politics is clean here—was exposed as having charged taxpayers more than \$12,000 for a four-day trip to Uluru in 2012 for him and his family, including \$8,000 for business class seats for his children. More recently, late last year, the member for Swan got himself into strife when it was discovered that he had charged taxpayers to fly his wife home after their wedding.

It goes on. There is the, I think you could probably say, still unresolved question of why the current foreign minister charged something like \$30,000 to the taxpayer for getting a RAAF VIP jet to fly her and her partner back from a charity dinner in Perth. Of course, probably the example of all examples was former Speaker Bronwyn Bishop, who famously charged taxpayers \$5,000 to hire a helicopter to go less than 100 kilometres from Melbourne down to Geelong, although, when I say that is the most famous example, perhaps there is one more famous example now: the very recent example of former health minister Sussan Ley, who, on the taxpayer tab, went to the Gold Coast—overnight, I think—and, while there, bought an investment property. There are just so many examples. So no wonder the community is so critical of members of parliament and of senators. No wonder there is a broad and, I think, a deserved view in the community that way too many—in fact, one would be too many—members and senators have their snouts in the trough and are profiting from the taxpayer on account of their job.

I make the point again that time and time again it has been shown that governments have been slow to respond, and they have really only responded, frankly, to shut the public up. After the Bronwyn Bishop episode, the so-called choppergate, the government, to its credit, commissioned an inquiry by two senior gentlemen, Mr Conde and Mr Tune. It came up with 36 recommendations. But here we are, a year later, and it is only now that those recommendations are being implemented on account of the scandal surrounding former health minister Sussan Ley.

So we have a problem. There is no doubt we have a problem, and I do not accept that the government has gone nearly far enough with the reforms that are in the process of being implemented. Frankly—and I probably should not be this cynical but there is reason to be this cynical and sceptical—until all of those reforms are implemented in full, I will be suspicious about whether we will ever see them all implemented in full. Remember, after former Speaker Bronwyn Bishop's choppergate affair, there was an inquiry. There were 36 good recommendations made, and a year later virtually none of those recommendations had been implemented, and they were only implemented on account of this most recent scandal. In other words, the government at the time was happy to look strong and decisive and to send the message to the community that it was going to crack down on the rorting, but it turned out to

be just theatre. It had its inquiry, it got its recommendations and then it just shelved them. It was happy for the matter to be behind it and for the community to think the issue was resolved. It was only after the more recent example with the Gold Coast purchase that the government thought: 'Oh, heavens! We're going to have to implement them after all.'

So I want the government to go further. The fact that the current reforms do not include any audit, for instance, of the historic use of parliamentary allowances over the last several years suggests—well, it shows—that the government, supported by the opposition, is prepared to let bygones be bygones and thinks anything that might have occurred in the past should be left in the past. I do not accept that. And that brings me to the substantive substance of this bill.

This bill would build on the reforms that have been announced in recent weeks and build on them on a substantive way, because all this bill requires—and I think it is quite a reasonable and achievable bill and I will be very disappointed if the government and the opposition do not support this bill—is that there be that audit, back to the 2013 election in fact. All use of parliamentary allowances by all members and senators back to the 2013 election would be audited to find out who else had their snout in the trough.

It is not good enough that we just focus on a few unfortunate souls who got busted. We should focus on all the other people who tripped around this country, for what any reasonable person would say was substantively for private purposes, and then dressed it up as official travel, signed a form to say it was an official trip and took the coin.

I tell you what, that is theft in my world and by my standards, and I am sure the member for Indi who seconded this bill would agree with me.

Ms McGowan: Absolutely.

Mr WILKIE: If someone trips around this country and says it is an official trip and has the taxpayer pay for it but in reality the substantive business was personal, then that is fraud and that is theft.

That brings me in fact to the second and third components of my private members' bill. In future, whenever a member or senator puts in a claim for the payment of allowances for an official trip, he or she should list on that form—and the form should be changed to allow this—and that form should list all substantive activities conducted on the trip, including private activities. That way, in future, the bureaucracy here, but also the public who would have access to those forms online, would be able to look and make their own judgement. And, if a health minister in future spends a night on the Gold Coast and has one meeting with someone about a relatively minor matter and also buys a house while they are there, then the public can judge that trip for what it is—and that is a private trip, a trip for which not one cent of public money should be claimed.

The final component is, when there is misuse, it should not be a small fine, it should not be a slap on the wrist; it should be 'call in the police'—because if any person in this country claims money fraudulently from the Commonwealth, that is theft whether, they be a Centrelink recipient, a business or a member of parliament. I call on the government and the opposition to support this private member's bill. Thank you.

The SPEAKER: Is the motion seconded?

Ms McGowan: I am delighted to second this motion and I reserve my right to speak.

The SPEAKER: The time allotted for the debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Higher Education

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (10:23): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

- (a) in the coming weeks, more than one million Australians will resume their university studies for the 2017 academic year;
- (b) the Government's failure to release its plans for university funding and fees is creating uncertainty for students planning to commence their studies in 2018 and beyond;
- (c) Australian students already pay some of the highest university fees in the OECD;
- (d) increasing fees will leave young Australians with significant debt burdens; and
- (e) paying off significant debt puts extra pressure on young Australians at critical times in their lives, like when they are saving for a house or considering starting a family; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

- (a) end the uncertainty facing students and their parents and finally make it clear, after nine months of inaction, what its plans are for higher education funding and fees from 2018;
- (b) rule out significant fee increases;
- (c) abandon its 20 per cent cut to university grants;
- (d) reverse its short-sighted cuts to the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program; and
- (e) confirm that it will prevent the Americanisation of our university system through higher fees and higher student debt.

Over the past few weeks more than one million university students are going to university for the first time or going back for a second or third academic year, and it is a very exciting time but also quite a nerve-racking time for students and their families, particularly for those students attending university for the first time. This year in particular there is a greater sense of anxiety because of the uncertainty created by the Liberals' absolute failure to declare what they intend to do with university funding in the future. Students, parents and universities just do not know what this government's plan is for fees in 2018 and beyond.

This Minister for Education and Training was sent in to quieten things down after the previous minister made such a comprehensive hash of university and school funding. But all we have had since the change in personnel is inaction, inertia and obfuscation. This minister has managed to deliver nothing more than cuts and force another review into the university sector. This is now the 26th review, talkfest, inquiry we have had into higher education since the Liberals came to office.

We have had the Review of the Demand Driven Funding System, the evaluation of the HEPP Program, the Higher Education Infrastructure Working Group, the assessment of Australia's publicly funded research system—all of these reviews and yet no conclusions from any of them about how universities are to be funded and what students are to pay in the future. In fact, it has been nine months since the delivery of this, the *Driving innovation*,

fairness and excellence in Australian higher education review, with not a word from the government about what it intends to do with this options paper.

We have seen 1,200 submissions from across the university higher education sector and a panel appointed to help the government develop its response and still not a word—complete silence—on what the government's intentions are. In fact, that has forced universities into one-year funding arrangements with the government. Of course, that is difficult for universities and for their staff, who do not know whether they will have jobs next year, but it is particularly concerning for students and their parents, who do not know what the government's intention is when it comes to university fees to make up for these funding shortfalls.

What we know is that this is not about driving innovation, fairness and excellence in higher education, as the review title claims; it is about finding \$3 billion worth of cuts in the university sector. That is the job that the new education minister has been given: 'Find \$3 billion of cuts in universities.' We still have the 20 per cent cut to Commonwealth grants in the budget papers—that zombie measure is still in the budget papers—and a university sector that knows that the cuts are coming but does not know where they will fall. There is no plan for reforming the university sector; there is only a plan for more cuts, including the 40 per cent cut to the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program, the program that has been so successful at getting young Australians from disadvantaged backgrounds and from regional areas who are the first in their family to attend university to go to university and in fact supporting them to complete their studies when they get there.

All we know is that Australian students are already paying some of the highest contributions in the OECD towards their university education and that there is still a plan from this government for \$100,000 university degrees. You only need to look at the history of the Liberals in this respect. From 1997 to 1999, the Howard government slashed operating grants for universities and ripped away almost five per cent of their funding. In 1997, they introduced differential HECS, raised fees and introduced—remember this?—full-fee-paying places for Australian students. The first \$100,000 degree is not coming; it is not in prospect; it was in 2003 at the University of Sydney for veterinary science. It took Labor's election to reverse these \$100,000 degrees for Australian undergraduate students from 2007 onwards.

Every time this government has deregulated fees, universities have almost immediately gone to the highest possible deregulated fee, just as they did in the United Kingdom. \$100,000 degrees? That is what is in prospect for Australian students.

The SPEAKER: Is the motion seconded?

Ms Butler: I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mr WALLACE (Fisher) (10:28): I am probably unusual among members of this House in having experience of both the university and the vocational education sectors in this country. Eighteen months after leaving school, I became an apprentice carpenter and joiner. I enjoyed the work and I learnt a lot from my old boss, Peter Mahony, and his foreman, David Blackburn—although they would probably beg to differ! I enjoyed the work. However, one undeniable fact that I did learn as a young apprentice was to expect very little but obstruction and intimidation from the then Builders Labourers Federation, the union that is now known as the CFMEU. But that is a story for another day.

When I examine this motion, I find that it is based on false premises which I cannot accept. First, it is based on the misplaced assertion that the government does not have a clear and well-resourced policy to support universities and ensure that all Australians are given the opportunity to get a degree. It does, as the Minister for Education and Training has laid out in this place and others.

Second, it is based on the wrong idea that the Australian university education as supported by this government is not excellent value. It is, as demonstrated by the many thousands of students from all over the world who come here to study. It is also a little-known fact that domestic university students in some courses pay as little as 20 per cent of the actual costs of their degree. That is why HECS has its name. It is the Higher Education Contribution Scheme. You would think that, if the Labor Party were so aggrieved by students having to pay for even a part of their education costs, they would reintroduce free tertiary education. But, of course, for all their posturing and confected outrage, they have not and they will not, because they are all talk and no action just like this motion put by the member for Sydney.

I want to talk about the most damaging false assumption that lies beneath this motion. It is not the university system that is letting down many young people; it is the misguided belief that going to university is the only or, indeed, best path to a better future for all of our nation's young people. We often talk about finding the jobs of the future, but there are skilled jobs crying out to be filled in this country today. The Department of Employment creates a list every year of jobs where local businesses have difficulty recruiting skilled people. Look, for example, at the skills shortage list for my state of Queensland. You will not find on that list public relations managers, civil engineers or, indeed, lawyers. These are all admirable professions filled with dedicated and skilled workers, but the fact is we have plenty of them.

What you will find on that list are the skilled workers that Queensland desperately needs; bricklayers, butchers, carpenters, joiners, painters and plasterers. You will find welders, panel beaters, machinists and chefs. Stonemasons are also on the list. So are floor tilers and roof tilers. Most of these trades are listed as a statewide shortage, meaning employers are unable to fill or have considerable difficulty filling vacancies. Consider this startling fact: in the great state of Queensland, employers are finding it nigh-impossible to get a skilled bricklayer or a skilled butcher.

The belief that a university education is the only or the best way to get ahead must take a share of the blame in creating this situation. The consequences for young people that the member for Sydney places at the government's door really come from this false assumption. Research by Graduate Careers Australia tells us that, in the first year after graduating from university, 73.9 per cent of new graduates who want one find a full-time job. Their median income is \$54,000. In contrast, research from the National Centre for Vocational Education Research suggests that 77.6 per cent of VET graduates are employed after their training. Their median income is \$56,000. In some parts of the construction industry electricians are earning up to \$80,000 to \$100,000. Of course, a university education sector is expensive. It is an intensive and resource-heavy process with no immediate commercial outcome. In contrast, an apprentice generates income from day one.

If we do not do something about our skills shortages, this country will be facing a skills shortage not seen since the Second World War.

Ms BUTLER (Griffith) (10:33): This is a very important motion because Labor believes that students who have worked hard should be able to go to university without facing crippling debts but, unfortunately, we have got a government with a deregulation agenda and an agenda of cuts to public funding for universities. A 20 per cent cut to public funding of universities is still in their budget papers from the 2014 budget, which must, I would guess, go down in history as one of the worst budgets of a Commonwealth government and which certainly has had lasting negative effects on the country's economy and confidence. It is a budget that contained a number of zombie measures, and the cuts to higher-education funding are one of them.

The government currently has a consultation process in place which still flags fee deregulation for some courses, even though the electorate so comprehensively rejected fee deregulation, so comprehensively expressed outrage and concern about the prospect of degrees costing \$100,000. To expect young people to be loaded up with lifelong debt in order to get an undergraduate degree is completely unreasonable and is terrible not just for the individual students themselves but, of course, for the economy as a whole. That is why the fact that there is a consultation process in place that was kicked off by a discussion paper that still flags full deregulation for some courses should be sounding significant alarm bells for the community.

We saw that there were 1,200 submissions to that consultation process. The government has created a panel to review the submissions and to report on them, but here we are around nine months later and there is still no word from the government on what we can expect from them in relation to their higher education policy. Now, that is a problem because it is already almost March and universities need to be in a position to know what is going to happen to them in 2018. More importantly, students and their families need to know what is going to be expected of them in 2018. We have not even had a policy announcement yet, let alone seen any legislation to give effect to whatever it is that the government is planning in order to find the cuts that are reflected in the 2014 budget papers.

We do not know what this government is going to do, but we do know that they are actively considering fee deregulation for at least some courses and that they are also actively considering including a loan fee on HECS, basically increasing the amount of HECS that people are expected to pay over the course of their lives and justifying that as though it were a loan fee and as though the entire cost of the higher education contribution should be treated as though the full amount of the loan being carried is something that government has borrowed, which is a ridiculous proposition. To suggest that whatever university funding is provided is 100 per cent borrowed by this government is manifestly ridiculous, and to say that you should calculate a loan fee on the basis of what the real interest rate would have been in the event it had been applied over the period of someone paying back their HECS debt is, and should rightly be, rejected. But the government is actively considering that as well. They are looking for ways to increase fees for students and, at the same time, they are looking for ways to find opportunities to cut billions of dollars from the higher education sector.

The government should rule out policies that would leave students in crippling debt. It is debt that would affect them not just now but into the future. That is particularly a problem since the government is failing to act on the issue of housing affordability, so students will take on the \$100,000 degree, have the lifelong debt and then, in the future, be in a situation

where in order to get a mortgage they will take on even more amounts of crippling debt. What will that mean for our economy? I think it is pretty clear that people who have massive student loans and massive mortgages are less likely to go to the coffee shop and buy a cappuccino. They are less likely to go to the bookshop. They are less likely to go and spend money in the small businesses that rely on people being customers in order for their businesses to operate. The government should think very clearly before loading up young people in this country with further debt in order for them to get an education.

Going to university should depend on hard work and not on your parents' wealth. That is an important principle. Yet in this country it is still the situation that kids who are from lower income backgrounds and kids who are from other groups that have traditionally been disadvantaged are under-represented in higher education. The government, by the \$152 million cut to the HEPPP, the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program, is making it harder for universities to reach out to under-represented students. That is a real shame because it is Indigenous students who will suffer, it is prospective students from Indigenous backgrounds who will suffer, as will students with a disability and students from low-income backgrounds.

Education is an essential ingredient of economic growth. The university sector deserves some certainty, and so do the people of Australia.

Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson—Assistant Minister for Vocational Education and Skills) (10:38): It is my pleasure to start today by congratulating all of those students who have taken the opportunity to continue their education, whether that be through vocational education or through to universities. Congratulations! I think that in continuing your education you have certainly chosen wisely.

It is true that we do have a record number of students in the higher education system. More than 1 million Australians are at university or are studying at other non-university institutions of higher education. The Turnbull government is investing a record \$16.7 billion this financial year, 2016-17, to provide even more opportunities for students across Australia, particularly in regional Australia, to have a higher education.

There are a couple of issues that I would particularly like to touch on today, and I would like to start by focusing on the coalition's commitment to the education highway, which I have previously spoken about a number of times in this place. The coalition sees education as a highway, which starts effectively at preschool, goes through school, and potentially goes through vocational education and on to higher education, to university. We do not necessarily see each part as a discrete and mutually exclusive part. They are all interconnected.

As the Assistant Minister for Vocational Education and Skills, I am very much focused on vocational education to make sure that we are attracting people into the sector. I see and the Turnbull government sees vocational education as part of the education highway. It is a destination in itself but it is also an opportunity for students to at some stage look at moving from vocational education to universities, should they wish to. So, vocational education is certainly a destination in its own right, but it is also a pathway through to universities for those who choose it. What we need to do is make sure that we are properly equipping our students as they go through school for higher education, tertiary education.

There is one area that is particularly concerning to the coalition, and that is ensuring that our students have the appropriate skills in the STEM subjects—science, technology, engineering and maths. We know that we are already lagging behind in those areas, particularly when you compare us internationally. I do have some statistics that I think are useful to once again put on the record in relation to science, technology, engineering and maths and what is happening in our schools at the moment. If you compare the figures from 1992 to 2012—so, over a 20-year period—there were 30,800 more students in year 12 in 2012 to what there were in 1992, but there was a significant decrease in the number of students who were studying the science and maths subjects. There were 8,000 fewer physics students, 4,000 fewer chemistry students and 12,000 fewer biology students. The Turnbull government are very committed to making sure that we turn that around.

As part of the National Innovation and Science Agenda that was released over 12 months ago, we looked particularly at what we could do to increase the STEM skills. We recognised that we needed to start developing the pipeline, and that is why we have injected money into the preschool area, into kindergartens, to make sure our students have access to science and maths so that they develop what hopefully will be a lifelong understanding and commitment to science and maths as they go from kindergarten, all the way through their school years and on to tertiary education.

What we are very conscious of is the number of students who are choosing at year 11 and 12 to do a lower level maths, thinking that that will give them the best possible ATAR or in Queensland, for example, at the moment, the OP. What that does is potentially put these students somewhat behind the eight ball when they go to university to study courses such as engineering, where they do not have the higher level maths that they need. So what the Turnbull government is committed to is developing that education pipeline so that our students from the kindergarten years through to years 11 and 12 are developing a lifelong interest and the skills in the STEM subjects so that they can take on the careers of the future. This is where our focus is—not looking at it in isolation, one part of education, but looking at the totality.

Mrs ELLIOT (Richmond) (10:44): I rise to speak in favour of the member for Sydney's motion regarding this government's constant cuts and attacks on our universities. It is indeed a very timely motion, with so many new students starting uni and with orientation weeks across the country last week. With more than a million students resuming their university studies in the coming weeks, it is very timely that we are discussing this very important motion.

I particularly note in this motion the government's failure to release its plans for university funding and fees and the real uncertainty this creates for students planning to commence their studies in 2018 and beyond. This government repeatedly puts forward plans to cut university funding. The magnitude of these cuts will not only put at risk the quality of higher education provided by Australian universities but they are also at odds with the government's rhetoric, which claims they want to reinvigorate the economy through education, research and innovation. Well, you cannot do that by cutting education funding—that is the reality. Australia's world-class university system is evolving to support a transition that is under way across the economy and workforce, a process that cannot be achieved while making cuts of this scale.

It was Labor that opened the doors of our universities to thousands more Australians, and we are very proud of that. A Labor government would stand on our strong record of investment in education, including at the last election where we committed to investing more in our universities and significantly increasing per student funding and investing more in schools, because success at university depends on a great school education. In fact, Labor went to the last election with a promise to spend around \$50 billion on universities and schools, which is the same amount the Liberals and Nationals are prepared to give away in tax cuts to big business and multinationals. It is all a question of priorities and all a question of choices. We choose funding education; they choose tax breaks for multinationals and big business. It shows what their priorities are.

Labor's story has always been one of vision; we have always been the party committed to education. In contrast, the Liberal-National government's counterproductive plan for our education system includes wanting to introduce \$100,000 degrees, creating unfair debts for students and ensuring only the most well-off would get to go to university. This is especially unfair for those kids from rural and regional areas, like my electorate in northern New South Wales. Parents constantly tell me that university is just not going to be on their radar for their children if we see these massive increases and we see \$100,000 university degrees.

It is estimated that by 2020, two out of every three jobs created in Australia will require a diploma or a higher qualification. The government's policies fail to recognise this and would see us fall behind, committing us to a lower standard of living and lower incomes for those students. The reality is that universities across Australia are facing very significant budget cuts under this government. It is a concern for students, for their parents, for their families and for teaching staff right across the board. These are major, major cuts that they are looking at and they will be absolutely catastrophic.

We have seen all sorts of evidence from economists, the OECD, the Australia Institute and so many others that show investment in education builds a more prosperous nation, it is good for our economy, it is good for our students and that there are multiple benefits. At present, Australian students already pay some of the highest tuition fees in the OECD, second only to the US. Under these circumstances already, the Turnbull government's plans to cut public investment by at least 20 per cent per student and make students pay significantly more cannot be justified. It is a cruel choice and an unfair choice as well. It will impact those in our communities who most need to support to actually get to university.

The government is also cutting \$152 million in funding from the Higher Education Participation and Partnerships Program. This program is a very important one that aims to ensure that those Australians from lower socioeconomic backgrounds who have the ability to study at university have the opportunity to actually get there—but the government wants to cut that. This program provides funding to assist universities to undertake activities and implement strategies that improve access to undergraduate courses, as well as, really importantly, improve the retention and completion rates of those students to actually keep them at university. Of course, the government is going to cut that, because it is a program that will help so many students, particularly from those lower socioeconomic backgrounds. Funding for this program and funding for a full Indigenous program should be restored to assist universities with these essential targeted equity and access programs. That is what we need to have in place.

But in recent years, higher education policy has been in chaos under this government. During the election, the Liberal-National government did not release a single higher education policy, because, quite frankly, they do not care. Instead, they have had 25 reviews, inquiries and talkfests—that is all we hear. They have got these massive cuts in place, in addition to the uncertainty of the one-year funding agreements that are really holding back our universities and our students. Anybody who says that there is not a relationship between funding and the quality of education is just kidding themselves; it is an excuse to not properly fund it. Labor believes education is critical to Australia's future and to a strong economy for secure jobs.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey—Government Whip) (10:49): It is a pleasure to rise on this motion from the member for Sydney on higher education. It is interesting to listen to the member for Richmond speaking about Labor's vision for higher education and education generally. Labor's record in office is an absolutely classic example of the Labor Party doing the easy half of the workload: spending the money, but not making a serious effort to fund it. Of course, that was the case when they uncapped the university places in Australia. They delivered half the deal.

Since that time in 2008, places have grown exponentially by 71 per cent, compared to 35 per cent growth in GDP in those eight years. Something has to give. We have faced the same conundrum in a number of other policy areas where Labor has implemented a vast plan for the future with no plan on how to fund it. We are left with some fairly unpleasant types of solutions that we can ponder in this place. We could cut intake numbers, I suppose. We could trim VET FEE-HELP. We could find savings in other programs, something that the Labor Party consistently opposes—any savings in any other area. We could raise taxes. Already, Mr Deputy Speaker, as you well know, this country is falling well behind and well out of step with our trading partners when it comes to general taxation and specific taxation across a wide range of measures. Whatever we do, if we continue to get out of step with our trading partners, it will come to no good.

And of course there is the issue raising its head now. We do not have an answer on this at the moment. Former students are coming to me in increasing numbers and saying: 'I've done my university degree, but I can't get a job. There are too many students in this area that are qualified in my industry.' The coalition will not be keen to move in that area of capping places, but I think we have to start putting some pressure on the universities to take some responsibility for the numbers of students they are accepting into certain courses. They have a responsibility beyond just delivering the degree. They have a responsibility to say to the student at the beginning of the course, 'You have a reasonable prospect of getting a job when you finish.' Theoretically, the market should sort this sort of thing out, but markets are often too slow an indicator to bring about change in time.

We must be collectively up to having an honest and open debate about the issue. Something has to be done in higher education. As the Labor Party knows and as you know, Mr Deputy Speaker, we have already tried in a previous parliament to make moves to make the income from education more closely match the expenditure.

The proposition that is put forward by the Labor Party that somehow the coalition is withdrawing money from higher education is an absolute fabrication. There is a record amount of \$16.7 billion per year. There is something about a record. A record indicates that it has not been done before, that \$16.7 billion a year has not been spent before by the

Commonwealth on education. We cannot listen to an argument that says we—the parliament, the government—are cutting funding for education when in fact we are reaching record levels. Funding cannot continue to grow as a proportion of GDP unless we savage some other part of the economy. If we do not do anything, our tertiary sector will fall behind, and—this is the very important point—if we allow it to fall behind, one of our greatest export earners as a country will be emasculated.

In the last parliament we tried to uncap fees, and we have taken that off the table. Our opponents, the Labor Party, used that to bludgeon us around the head about \$100,000 degrees, which were of course a complete beat-up, a beat-up of the first order. To continue to use that language after we have taken that option off the table is misleading. In another place, I would use a stronger word, and it would start with an L. We will bring reforms to this parliament by midyear.

Mr PERRETT (Moreton—Opposition Whip) (10:54): I rise to support the motion by the member for Sydney on behalf of all university students in all universities but particularly the more than 13,000 students who attend Griffith University, in my electorate of Moreton. Today is their first day of lectures for 2017, apart from those hardworking souls who did the summer subjects. For many it will be their first ever day at university, the beginning of what we hope will be an amazing journey. I wish them all the best for their studies, especially my niece Erin Shearer and Ella Harrison from Warwick.

Last Tuesday, I had the pleasure of attending the O-Week Market Day at the Nathan Campus of Griffith University. I spoke with Lucas Kennedy, the president of the Student Representative Council, about campus life and what students are concerned about. Like many of his fellow students, Lucas said his family encouraged him to go to university so that he could launch himself into a good job and get ahead, but Lucas questions why he should be saddled with unreasonable debt when he graduates. Unlike my generation, many first year university students commencing today will graduate with a hefty debt. They will know the burden of debt before they have the satisfaction of starting their careers. We know how unaffordable housing is becoming, and these young Australians will be saddled with debt before they can even think about saving for a house. Universities should not only be for the elite. They should be the melting pots in our society, where our brightest come together, bringing all parts of our community together to learn, to research, to make discoveries that will make all of our lives better and to develop the industries of the future and, more importantly, the jobs of the future. That is where the jobs and growth will come from.

It is critical that university education be accessible to all Australians who have the drive and the ability to learn. We do not want our tertiary education system to become Americanised. We need our best and brightest to be given opportunities, not constrained by their postcode. We do not want our children paying \$100,000 degrees. I know \$100,000 might not be much for those living in harbourside mansions, but it actually is a lot of money for most Australians. To a 17-year-old or an 18-year-old school leaver, it could be the factor that makes them decide to not continue their education—and what a terrible waste of human resources that would be. It should not be your parent's bank balance that determines whether you go to university.

Lucas is also worried about budget cuts at Griffith University. He says the cuts will see two staff per department cut. It will also mean that amenities will not be upgraded or new ones

that are needed will not be installed. Lucas showed me a mother's room at the Nathan Campus that needs an upgrade. This space is for student mothers with children; it is a space for them to breastfeed their babies. It is a facility that is particularly important for women who are reskilling for the workforce. And Mr Turnbull has just made it a whole lot harder for university students to get through their university years. How? When we see the Fair Work Commission's decision to cut the penalty rates of some of Australia's lowest paid workers, who will this hit hardest? Women, especially, but also university students who find time to work on the weekend. I spoke to Lucas about this decision and asked him how it would affect students at Griffith uni. He told me that he believes it will force more students to work more hours during the week, taking them out of classes and tutorials.

Could the Turnbull government make it any harder for our young Australians who are just trying to get ahead in life? Well, they are. This week they have introduced a bill that will have young people wait five weeks before they can access Newstart. The government want to push 22- to 24-year-olds onto the lower Youth Allowance, which will mean a cut of about \$48 per week. It is easy to see where the priorities of this government are. They are giving a pay cut to young students and preventing them from accessing Newstart for five weeks; and they are intent on making them pay \$100,000 for their degrees, all the while focusing on giving a tax break to big multinational companies, which will be a \$50 billion tax give-away. What sort of skewed value system is that? There is a quote from Confucius, which says:

If your plan is for one year plant rice. If your plan is for ten years plant trees. If your plan is for one hundred years educate children.

Sadly, Prime Minister Turnbull's only plan is to keep his own job—and that is deplorable.

Labor will fight for students to get a fair go, to be paid a fair return for their work on weekends, to get the help they need when they need it and to make sure they can get a university education if they have the ability, drive and talent. The future of Australia will be determined by the education we give our young Australians today. Sadly, the Turnbull government and the National Party are betraying the bush when it comes to education, and we see that in the front-page story of *The Australian* today. I am proud to commend this motion to the House.

Mr WOOD (La Trobe) (10:59): I rise to speak on the motion regarding university funding and fees, a private member's motion from the member for Sydney. In 2016, we had Monash University in my electorate of La Trobe. Monash University's Berwick campus offered, from memory, four courses. Then we got the incredible news that the Monash campus in Berwick had decided to close shop and were planning to move out. That was of great concern, obviously, for the students currently undertaking courses, whether it be for business or for nursing.

The approach of the Labor Party at the time was basically to just attack, attack and attack, but they came up no solutions. What we realised we needed in our electorate was—and this is something the Prime Minister has been a great advocate for—innovation and research, and ensuring that, when our students graduate from university, they actually have jobs in their field rather than leaving university and not having a job to go to. I know that is something Minister Simon Birmingham has been a great advocate of. Also, we need to make sure business actually works with universities. There is no use in students going to universities and doing degrees if there are no jobs at the end of their university courses.

I am very proud to say that, working with Minister Birmingham, the great news is we now have Federation University Australia coming to the old Monash-Berwick campus. This is something we said right from the start. We want to focus on innovation. We want to focus on research. The courses they will be offering include a Bachelor of Community and Human Services, a Bachelor of Business and a Bachelor of Business (Human Resource Management). There will also be a number of marketing courses, accounting courses and education courses. There will be a Bachelor of Information Technology, a Bachelor of Information Technology (Business Information Systems) and a Bachelor of Information Technology (Mobile App Development). To me, it is so important to have young people in Australia—and, obviously, locally in La Trobe—want to get back into research and developing apps, which not only are great for the community but also potentially create businesses for them. So this is something that we in La Trobe are very much looking forward to. There will also be a Bachelor of Veterinary and Wildlife Science, and they will have flexible modes of delivery for nursing courses.

At the same time, the Turnbull government recognises that this system must be affordable and provide a return on investment for both the student and the nation. Remember that taxpayers across the country are paying for students to go to university. That is something we support, but it is something which needs to always be remembered. A key challenge is how to make the system sustainable for generations of students in the future. The Turnbull government released the policy paper *Driving innovation, fairness and excellence in Australian higher education* on budget night last year and invited submissions on how best to ensure we keep the system sustainable and affordable for future generations of Australians. The Turnbull government legislated a package of higher education reforms in the middle of the year to provide the sector sufficient time to implement the new arrangements from 1 January 2018.

Australia has one of the most generous student loan schemes in the world: the Higher Education Loan Program, otherwise known as HELP. This means that Australians can go to universities or other higher education providers without paying up-front fees, and that is something that is very important. We will keep the loan system in place. Our policy option paper released on budget night proposed that all students be charged the same loan fee to partly recover the costs their fellow Australians are subsidising. I repeat that; this is something really important. The local tradie may be an apprentice, but their apprenticeship will not take four or five years, whereas someone else is actually going to university. We want people to go to university and we want to support those in university, but it has to be fair and balanced. That is what the Turnbull government is endeavouring to do. Unlike Labor, who cut \$6 billion from research, we support research, we support innovation and we support students to get the best out of their university qualifications.

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (11:04): I am thrilled to rise today to support the member for Sydney's motion—an incredibly important motion, I might say. During O-week around the country, our university students headed off for their academic year—a year of uncertainty not just for those students but for the institutions, the universities themselves. We can place responsibility for that right at the feet of those sitting opposite in this House today.

I am pleased to join the member for Sydney, the member for Griffith, the member for Richmond and the member for Moreton on this side, who stand with me today to put a spike

in the ground that says: 'We will back students in this country. We will back young people from our electorates accessing university and being successful at university.' Those opposite use coded words like 'sustainable and affordable'. Since the election of the government, which used to be the Abbott government but now is the Turnbull government and tomorrow could be anybody's government, we know that, when they use words like 'sustainable and affordable', that is code for cuts and for narrowing who can potentially attend university. Make no mistake.

Today we have heard from the other side lots of rhetoric about graduates going to university and then not being able to get a job. They are bleeding hearts over there about these young people who go to university, get a certification and then cannot get a job. They like competition everywhere else, but they do not like competition when a kid from Lalor is knocking a kid from one of their electorates out of a job because they got into university.

It is Labor's legacy and Labor's history that means that children in my electorate are focused and keen to get a university education. I stand here as somebody who spent years of their professional life teaching year 12 students, supporting year 12 students, being a coordinator for year 12 students and sitting with them to talk about university and what it would mean for them. I was not in classrooms when \$100,000 degrees and deregulation were mooted by the government, those opposite. But I can tell you I know the ramifications of the increase in the debt to students in homes around Australia. It means that working-class kids, kids whose parents did not go to university, will face an extra hurdle. That hurdle is actually convincing their parents that this is a good idea, that debt is a good idea, that there is a brighter future where they can get an education and get one of those good jobs that the Prime Minister and the member for Deakin like to talk about so they can buy a house.

There is absolutely no doubt that the uncertainty in this sector is being driven by this doing-nothing government that just continue their out-of-touch ways to breed uncertainty not just in the university sector but in the school sector and the early childhood education sector. When it comes to education, they are casting about for ideas and delivering nothing for Australian children.

Let's go to the things that the government are doing on the ground that, layer upon layer, are undermining our young people from getting ahead in life. I have spent time looking at this across the last 12 months. In fact, this time last year the office phone started to ring with calls from students in my electorate who were going to university, who had been to O Week and who were off and running—except there were delays at Centrelink for up to five months for those students to get their youth allowance. Then we saw headlines about student dropout rates. It is no surprise students are dropping out if they have not got money to put food on their own table, to put petrol in their car or, in Victoria, to top up their Myki ticket to get to university.

On top of that, there was the decision this week of this government to not put in a submission on behalf of those young people around this country to the Fair Work Commission around penalty rates. They should be held accountable. All of these students this year will wait probably another five months, given the delays at Centrelink that are occurring, for their youth allowance. In the meantime, they are going to take a hit to their penalty rates on Sundays. This government are doing nothing to support the education of students from my electorate. They are doing a lot to lock out kids from electorates like mine around this country

from opportunities, from being aspirational and from a good future. We should not be surprised. We have a Prime Minister who suggests parents should shell out for everything. So the message from this government to kids in my electorate is: get yourself some rich parents. This is not enough. The member for Sydney has it right.

Ms FLINT (Boothby) (11:09): The coalition government have made fixing Labor's higher education mess a priority, and I commend my South Australian colleague Minister Simon Birmingham on spearheading this effort. The approach of the Labor Party when in government could not have been more different to the coalition's. We have made a record investment in higher education, we have brought certainty to researchers, we are reversing the downward trend by prioritising STEM subjects and we are cleaning up Labor's failing VET system that left students laden with debt and no qualifications to show for it.

It is shameful to see Labor coming into this place pretending to care about students and researchers when they slashed \$6 billion from higher education and research funding when in office. By contrast, we came into government with an agenda to improve the higher education system. In 2016-17 we have invested a record \$16.7 billion into the sector. This is an achievement in itself but it is not what I am going to focus on because any government can spend money. The hard part is making sure it is well spent. This is the job the government have taken on and we have made real reforms to improve the system.

We have given the Tertiary Education Quality Standards Agency a mandate to improve standards in the sector. We will not let our education standards slip, and the agency have been given \$10.1 million to support their work. We also commissioned the Higher Education Standards Panel to make recommendations on improving transparency around university admission practices. The government have accepted its recommendations and are implementing them.

The coalition are putting students first. We are ensuring school leavers and students have all the information on courses to help them make better choices about what they learn. Too often students do not know what they want to do or what they are exactly enrolling in and slip through the gaps. Trial and error is a natural part of studying at university, but the \$8 million we have provided to develop the Quality Indicators for Learning and Teaching website will help students make the right choice the first time, saving valuable money and time. These are real improvements to the higher education system that Labor left in disarray. This is the smart policy work we are undertaking and it is very different to the work of Labor, who simply throw taxpayers' money at the problem and think their job is done.

This government are also turning the tide in the uptake of STEM subjects through the National Innovation and Science Agenda. We are ensuring Australians are digitally literate and ready to compete globally in the 21st century. The \$1.1 billion agenda will support research and promote science, maths and computing in schools, which will directly feed into the uptake of these subjects at university. As you can see, we are making the smart policy decisions that will see us well placed for the future. We are spending taxpayers' money effectively and efficiently, not wasting it as Labor did in office.

Labor claim to support researchers but they left the National Collaborative Research Infrastructure Strategy in disarray. The opposition refused to fund the strategy, leaving 1,700 experts and technicians uncertain about their future. The lack of care of Labor shows just how

little they actually understand research and development in Australian universities and why they cannot be trusted to take a mature approach to scientific investment in Australia.

The idea that Labor care about student debt is also laughable. The VET FEE-HELP system Labor set up in 2012 became one of the biggest rorts in recent times—and that is saying something! It will go down in history alongside pink batts, the school halls debacle and cash for clunkers. The difference with this rort is that students were the target. Under this scheme, VET FEE-HELP increased by 5,000 per cent and the average course costs skyrocketed from \$4,000 to \$14,000. Student loans increased by 11,000 per cent from \$26 million to \$2.9 billion. The end product of this was that students were loaded up with debts and, with no protections from course providers, many had no qualifications to show for it.

The coalition have passed legislation and put in place 20 reforms to fix this mess. It should be clear to Australians that: where Labor fails university students, we stand by them; where Labor abandons researchers, we will support their important work; and, where Labor implements poor public policy, as usual, we will be left with the task of cleaning up Labor's mess.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Rob Mitchell): The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

National Stronger Regions Fund and Victoria

Ms HENDERSON (Corangamite) (11:15): I seek leave to move a motion on the *Notice Paper* on behalf of the member for Mallee.

Leave granted.

I move:

That this House:

- (1) congratulates the Government on the success of the National Stronger Regions Fund (NSRF);
- (2) acknowledges the significant and positive impact that the NSRF is having in rural, remote and disadvantaged regions around Australia; and
- (3) notes that the:
 - (a) Government is investing \$153,814,329 million in 53 projects around Victoria under 3 rounds of the NSRF; and
 - (b) NSRF is delivering infrastructure projects to create jobs in regional areas, improve community facilities and support stronger and more sustainable communities across Victoria.

It is my great pleasure to rise and speak on the National Stronger Regions Fund, which was an incredibly important program right across not just Victoria but Australia. We are so incredibly proud of the way that this program has made such a difference to so many regional communities right around the country. This has been a wonderful program. I know how much this program has meant to the people of Corangamite.

In the last round of the program, \$13.3 million was committed to a number of very important projects. There was one in Queenscliff—the Destination Queenscliff project. I do want to commend the Borough of Queenscliffe on the work on this particular program, revitalising a very significant tourism town. There was also a wonderful project—the beautifying Winchelsea project. This was a project about injecting pride and investment in the

town of Winchelsea. After more than half a billion dollars is going to be spent on duplicating the Princes Highway—the township of Winchelsea is already looking magnificent—this program will really make a difference, also. There have been projects right across my electorate—whether it is Baptcare's Norlane community hub which is supporting Diversitat's vision with \$1 million or \$225,000 to upgrade refuelling facilities at Lethbridge Airport. In an incredible project, \$7.25 million was awarded to support Baptcare's Norlane community hub. This includes a very significant investment in affordable housing, in a new aged-care facility and in an allied health and medical practice. I know that is making an enormous difference to the people of northern Geelong. It, really, will be making an incredible difference to so many people seeking that access to housing.

I am incredibly proud to be part of a government that is putting regional Australia first, whether it is the NBN or critical mobile communications infrastructure—\$220 million has been invested in mobile base stations all around the country, including 18 base stations in Corangamite. The National Stronger Regions Fund is yet another example of our government's commitment to regional Australia. I do note that it has received a very positive tick of good health in the way the fund has been administered. I do want to say that, in contrast, under Labor the report of the Auditor-General of the ANAO into the predecessor of the National Stronger Regions Fund, the Regional Development Australia Fund, found that it was wanting. The minister at the time, the member for Ballarat, was found to have been wanting in the way in which that program had been administered.

We are now about to launch a new program, the Building Better Regions Fund. This is yet another example of our government's commitment to regional Australia. Two hundred and ninety-seven million dollars will be available in the first round. In fact, the infrastructure round closes tomorrow. For all those groups that are scrambling to get their application in, it does close tomorrow. Then, what we have done with this particular fund, in contrast to the National Stronger Regions Fund, is open up a separate community investment stream which opens up the criteria to a range of broader projects. What is also significant about the Building Better Regions Fund is that it is only open to minor capitals, regional cities and regional, rural and remote Australia. So the capital cities are excluded from this program. I think that has been a very important sign and a very important decision by our government in that we are strongly focused on delivering for regional Australia. We accept that not always do people living in regional Australia have the same opportunities as those living in the major cities. So this sends a very important message.

I am really excited about a number of projects that are going to be submitted under the Building Better Regions Fund, including a wonderful safe harbour project that has been driven by the Geelong yacht club. Again, it is my great pleasure to move this motion on behalf of the member for Mallee and to celebrate the wonderful work of the National Stronger Regions Fund.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Rob Mitchell): Is the motion seconded?

Dr McVeigh: I am pleased to second the motion, and I reserve my right to speak.

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (11:21): I rise with very mixed feelings about this motion. I note some of the things that the member for Corangamite referenced during her speech. One was that she thought this was an important decision—the new iteration of the RDAF, if you like. In growth corridors it is a very important decision, because in my

electorate we have been cut out of access to this new program. I rise today to speak to that—to speak to the value of what the first iteration, the RDAF program, under a Labor government, delivered across Victoria. In the electorate of Lalor it delivered a significant contribution to the development of Eagle Stadium the newest basketball/netball stadium in Victoria, one that is now being celebrated across the state. It is a state-of-the-art facility that would not have come to fruition without the first iterations of RDAF funding under a Labor government.

I would also acknowledge that in the last few years, in the second round, Wyndham City Council, with support from myself and state government, were successful in attracting \$3.25 million from the Stronger Regions Fund for the redevelopment of Chirnside Park, the home of the Werribee Football Club. That redevelopment will mean that that football ground will be fit for purpose for a premier club in the VFL. I know how hard I worked in the community to support Wyndham City Council to get support from the state government to work with those opposite, particularly the Victorian National members, to ensure that that funding came to Wyndham.

It is on the back of that that I rise today to say that it is a crying shame that this government sees fit to separate out from its notions of regions one of the fastest-growing growth corridors in the country—not just in Victoria. In the City of Wyndham 80 babies are born a week. There were 6½ thousand housing lots approved in Wyndham between January and July 2016. Let's put that in perspective. As the member for Lalor, I stood here when we tipped over to a city of 200,000; we are now a city of 230,000. That is the growth rate in the community that I represent. Over the past two decades, Melbourne's west had the fastest absolute rate of growth of any Melbourne region, and this is expected to continue over the next 20 years, from around 837,000 people across Melbourne's west to 1.2 million by 2031. My electorate has been absolutely cut out of accessing any of these funds to support them.

I will give you a snapshot of life in Wyndham as this growth occurs. As families move in, attracted by the affordable housing that is offered in our region, as those families move in, as 6½ thousand homes are built in a six-month period and filled with people from across Victoria, we work every day on building communities from the ground up—from developing plans for the next school to building that school, to establishing cultures in those schools. Wyndham City Council works tirelessly on infrastructure programs, on putting aside reserves and building football and soccer grounds and netball and basketball courts. That provision is extraordinary, and of course it all costs money. This government's decision to narrow who this fund will be open to means that this community is locked out of accessing those funds. It is a crying shame.

I note too the notion of regions, and the notion that regional people are only served by funds in regions. The member for Griffith was beside me before and we were having a bit of a chat about this. In the past iteration the member for Griffith was successful in getting a Ronald McDonald House built in her electorate. That is for regional families. Eagle Stadium is a regional facility and people from the regions will be accessing that. I think it is fairly clear that it is another example of this government's refusal to give Victoria what it deserves. It is ignoring Victorians. It is ignoring the people in my electorate.

Dr McVEIGH (Groom) (11:26): I rise happily to support this motion in relation to the National Stronger Regions Fund and its success under our government to date. The

government's focus on regions through this fund and what will now be the Building Better Regions Fund is an excellent example of the fact that the Turnbull government is so focused on regions throughout Australia. It is these regions, certainly in my case in the state of Queensland, in my electorate of Groom based around the significant regional centre of Toowoomba, that will underpin the economic prosperity of our country going forward.

I refer to recent comments by our Deputy Prime Minister by way of example, when Barnaby Joyce made public comments and suggestions encouraging people to consider their future careers and family lives in regional parts of the country. He named a couple of centres in his own electorate, as he would do as a good local member, such as Tamworth and Armidale, and I am pleased that he also mentioned Toowoomba, my home city, the second-largest inland city in this country behind our national capital, Canberra. Opportunities abound, and I am so pleased that our government has focused on supporting them in regional areas such as mine.

The governments that we have seen around this country at a state level, from our side of politics, have equally seen the benefit and the need to support regional development. I can mention the Western Australian government and the former Queensland LNP government, which focused very much on region development funds and regional development initiatives that drive innovation, jobs and family improvement in regional areas. Therefore I am pleased to see a continuation of this effort by our government under the Building Better Regions fund. It will refocus the remaining funding under the National Stronger Regions Program to better meet the needs of regional and remote communities. By refocusing that funding it will create jobs and drive economic growth in regional Australia and develop those kinds of regional communities that people will want to stay in or continue to come back to.

The fund is outlined under two streams. The infrastructure project stream will support projects that involve construction of new infrastructure or upgrade existing infrastructure that provides economic and social benefit to regional and remote areas. A minimum grant amount of \$20,000 through to a maximum of \$10 million will provide significant impetus for such projects throughout our country. The Community Investments Stream will fund community development activities including, but not just limited to, new or expanded local events, strategic regional plans, and leadership and capability building exercises. A minimum grant of \$5,000 in this case through to a maximum of \$10 million will, again, support those initiatives that we are so keen on seeing rolled out right across our country.

I attended a community briefing session on the Building Better Regions Fund in my own electorate just recently. It was one of the most well-attended briefings across the country, I am told; it was fully subscribed. There were a number of local government bodies there, businesses, charities, not-for-profit organisations: a tremendously broad range of interest. I am personally keen on promoting, as a local member, two major projects in my region that, if successful, would bring employment, would continue to build economic resilience in our community and they would continue to allow Toowoomba to build on the latest wave of infrastructure, both publicly and privately funded. I refer to LifeFlight, previously known as CareFlight, that essential regional health support service provided in the air by helicopters through to our local hospitals. I refer also to the tech park being proposed: a \$62 million proposal promoted by the Toowoomba and Surat Basin Enterprise organisation and FK Gardner. They want to drive data centres and other innovations that will bring new high-value

jobs to our region for now and into the future; therefore, driving innovation behind agriculture, construction and other initiatives right throughout our region.

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (11:31): It is great to see the government can actually fill the speaking list this sitting week, as during the last sitting week the government struggled to get a full list of speakers. This is the party that claims to represent regional Australia, yet up in the Federation Chamber it could not fill the speaking list on a similar motion talking about the Stronger Regions Fund. I note that this is not the only motion this week about stronger regions. This week they seem to want to talk about it, yet two weeks ago they could not fill their own speaking list. This really speaks to the chaos and the confusion of this government. Perhaps it is because the government is confused by the constant name changes to this program? Perhaps government members did not realise that it is the same pot of money. They keep changing the name to re-badge it and they say that it is new funding for regional Australia, but it simply is not.

The government like to congratulate themselves and say that this is a great new idea of theirs, but it is not. The original form of this fund actually started under the former Labor government—RDAF, the Regional Development Australia Fund—when we used to have transparency, when we used to really consult regional communities. In my part of the world, we used to consult through RDV—Regional Development Victoria—and then through the local RDA committee, which was the next step. This involved local, state and federal stakeholders in the regions so that they could put forward the best projects for their regions. The government has scrapped the experts in the community being involved in the decision-making, and has instead put it up to the department to say, 'You come up with the list.'

One of the concerns that has been raised in my area about this current round is: how do you measure the projects against each other? You can apply for a minimum of \$20,000 up to a maximum of \$10 million. How do you rank projects against each other with such a broad and large funding gap? How does the small community project that may only want \$20,000 to upgrade their hall compete against the City of Greater Bendigo, which might be going for \$10 million for a major infrastructure upgrade? How do you compare roads with community halls? The government have not been clear to the community about how projects will be ranked.

I am very fortunate to have very proactive councils in my part of the world. The City of Greater Bendigo has been successful in every round so far, in both RDAF and the Stronger Regions Fund. Through these programs we have secured funding for the Ulumbarra Theatre, funding for the Hanging Rock precinct in the Macedon Ranges, funding for the Bendigo Airport upgrade, funding for the Bendigo Aquatic Centre, funding for the Bendigo tennis centre redevelopment and we hope funding for the RSL redevelopment project—although this is not yet confirmed. While all of these projects had strong support in the community, they have had to engage with a government that has constantly backflipped on decisions. The Bendigo tennis centre was first funded under RDAF, but after the change of government former Minister Warren Truss scrapped the funding and said it was not a priority and that they would not be funding it. The community rallied and worked really hard with Tennis Australia and, finally, this year the government realised the mistake and have agreed to fund their fair share of the Bendigo tennis centre. It is great news, and work is underway. We are hoping that they keep their promise and fund their fair share of the Bendigo RSL revitalisation project.

Groups do get worried when they engage with this government because of the constant name changing of grants, the constant backflipping that the government do. Groups have said to me: 'It's not until we get the cheque from this government that we know we're actually going to get what's been committed.' We want to see the pipeline of funding continue. It does help create and secure construction jobs in our part of the world, and it does help create and build the needed infrastructure in our regions. However, smaller regional councils do struggle to compete against the bigger councils, and I do not believe that this government has done enough in the current process to ensure that those smaller regional councils have the resources to compete. We do want to see good infrastructure in the regions, but the government needs to stop playing politics. It needs to not change names of programs and it needs to commit from the beginning rather than commit, then cut, then re-commit. That uncertainty is just unfair.

Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (11:36): I found the last honourable member's address to this House bordering on funny, because we had the member for Bendigo complaining about a program that has delivered for Bendigo. That does not make a lot of sense. The chief complaint we heard from members opposite reflected in that last speech was an awful thing has happened, a crime almost. Do you know what it was? It was the change of a name of a program. That was the only criticism that the member could lay on this government. It was such a shallow rebuttal and complaint of a program that has clearly delivered for her own electorate of Bendigo.

The second and last complaint after a change of name was how challenging it is for governments to compare projects of a different size and different nature. Again, this goes to the shallowness, ineptitude and incompetence of the members opposite because anybody who spent so much as one or two days in business knows that is exactly what you need to do. It takes a degree of competence and this government has competence in spades. That is why we took to the 2013 election the commitment for the National Stronger Regions Fund, a program that ultimately aims to drive economic development, boost productivity and stimulate innovation by encouraging investment at the local community level.

The coalition understands, unlike the people opposite, that the economy is not an end unto itself. It is in fact the means by which you can enable local communities to take control of their own destiny. It is the means by which vital infrastructure and services are provided to Australian citizens. And it is that understanding of the power of economic development that underpins the National Stronger Regions Fund. The scope of the benefits have been very clear; it has all been about economic advantage long beyond the construction phase. This program has focused very much on the regions. I have a few statistics. Total investment has been \$632 million over three rounds: round 1, \$212 million; round 2, \$293 million; round 3, \$126 million.

I know this motion deals with Victoria specifically, and I have to say Victoria has done so well. Indeed the former member, the Labor Party member, mentioned the tennis centre—\$2 million—thank you very much to the coalition government. There was almost 3½ million dollars for destination Queenscliff in Victoria. With no disrespect for the members for Victoria, even on this side, there is one place more important and that, of course, is the state of Queensland. I am delighted, as the member for Fairfax, to see a very important project become the recipient of the National Stronger Regions Fund in my patch of the world for the Nambour Heritage Tramway.

The town of Nambour lies in the hinterland of the Sunshine Coast and it remains the capital of the hinterland in that important and vital region of Australia. But about a dozen years ago, just over a decade ago, we had the Moreton sugar mill close and the town has gone through a serious challenge, with almost \$70 million ripped out of its economy. The idea of this tramway is to use former cane train tracks as part of a broader reactivation plan for the town of Nambour. We have a local community Nambour alliance working so tightly and strongly, with a very good local councillor, to put together a reactivation plan for Nambour as a town. This is where the National Stronger Regions Fund comes in and will deliver half a million dollars to help that tramway get off the ground. It will be half a million dollars to help boost and reactivate the vital and important town of Nambour. I congratulate the coalition government.

Mr CONROY (Shortland) (11:42): I find it incredibly ironic that the government have chosen to bring on a private member's motion applauding themselves for their infrastructure investment when they have got an appalling record on infrastructure investment. Let's look at the facts. This government have cut infrastructure investment by 30 per cent compared to under the Labor government. They cannot even get their own figures right. They claim a \$50 billion infrastructure investment agenda when it is only \$34 billion according to the government's own papers. They mistake \$34 billion for \$50 million—no wonder the budget is in such a parlous state.

When we are talking about regional infrastructure that can have such a massive impact on individual communities, this government's track record is appalling. We have seen a \$1 billion cut to local councils for road investment, a \$1 billion cut that, I guarantee, is impacting on every single community in this country. In my region of Lake Macquarie and the Central Coast, we have seen over \$13 million ripped out of council budgets that could have had a real impact on improving our roads.

At the last election, we saw what this government really think about infrastructure spending. It was blatant pork-barrelling. That is all it was. Seventy-six of the 78 coalition road-building commitments were in coalition electorates. Well I have got news for them. They have 76 out of 150 seats so they were able to form government but to commit road funding to only their own electorates was blatant pork-barrelling. This mob opposite have got awful form on this. We only have to go back to the last time they were in government, when the regional rorts affair was at its height. We saw, for example, \$433,000 go into Coonawarra Gold for a project that was never built, run by a state Liberal candidate in South Australia. We saw grants for a cheese factory that closed down, for a rail line that burnt down and for a pet food factory that never opened. This is the quality of infrastructure investment and regional grants under this mob. The great pity of it is that important projects are missing out on funding because of this myopic focus, important projects that do qualify for the National Stronger Regions Fund but miss out.

The most egregious example of that is the Lake Macquarie Transport Interchange at Glendale. It is at the northern tip of Lake Macquarie. It is on the border between my electorate of Shortland of the electorate of Hunter, and all 11 Hunter councils agree it is the single most important project in our region. I think every member of this place can agree that getting councils to agree on anything is quite a challenge, so for 11 councils to agree that this one project is the most important project in our region is a significant achievement.

This project will have a massive impact on our region. The previous, Labor government funded it to the tune of \$13.5 million. One of the first actions of the incoming coalition government was to cut it by \$1 million—that is their commitment to the Glendale transport interchange. That will have a huge impact. To finish the first stage of the project, we need another \$32 million. Lake Macquarie City Council has committed \$6 million to it. Labor, at the last election, made a commitment of \$13 million. I would love the coalition to match that commitment, because this project, for a \$32 million investment by the three levels of government, will unleash over \$1 billion of private sector investment, which is cost-benefit return of over 30 to one; it will unlock 10,000 jobs in the local area; and it will lead to 6,000 new homes being built—all for \$32 million of investment. Yet this government's funds will not support this project, and it means that the entire Hunter region will be worse off.

This is the true story of infrastructure investment under this government: a myopic focus on short-term electoral advantage; an ideological agenda of cutting funding for public transport, to support roads; and a completely missed opportunity to improve the economic productivity and efficiency of this country.

I repeat the key facts as I conclude. Under this government, infrastructure investment has fallen by 30 per cent. We have them claiming that \$34 billion worth investment is really \$50 billion. All we see is pork-barrelling, and our nation will be poorer for that.

Mr BROAD (Mallee) (11:47): I am quite pleased to talk about this fund, the National Stronger Regions Fund. In some regards, it is about moving the ledger back in favour of our contribution. Every year, people in the electorate of Mallee contribute \$5.3 billion to the Australian economy. Now, I do not think it is unreasonable, given their significant contribution, for them to expect to be able to drive on a decent road. They should be able to make a mobile phone call—and I notice there is only one side of politics that have a Mobile Black Spot Program. They should have good educational opportunities for their children. They should know that when they go to the doctor they can, firstly, see a doctor and, secondly, be treated.

The National Stronger Regions Fund is working very well in our patch. We have delivered \$10 million towards a \$25 million upgrade of the Mildura runway. This has ensured we have air services that link Mildura to Sydney, to Adelaide, to Broken Hill and to Melbourne. There are 140 commercial flights a week, as well as the very important work that Air Ambulance and Angel Flight do out of Mildura.

We have \$10 million towards the Grampians Peak Trail, a \$28 million hiking path in one of the most beautiful parts of Victoria. This will drive tourism. There is another \$1.5 million towards the underground particle-matter research lab in Stawell—high-end scientific research from universities across the world delivered as part of the National Stronger Regions Fund. There is \$900,000 for sporting facilities at the South Mildura Football Netball Club, such as change rooms for our netballers and better courts, encouraging people to be more active more often in their sport.

There is \$800,000 to upgrade Swan Hill Regional Livestock Exchange, our commitment to a strong red meat sector—in contrast, I have to say, to the opposition, who when in government shut down the live export industry, and we saw the tumbling of our returns from red meat. There is \$900,000 for the Horsham children's hub, lifting parenting skills in one of the poorer regions of Horsham.

The party that I represent, the National Party, believe country people deserve a fair go, and it saddens me that for their \$5.3 billion worth of contributions they do not get more services in the country, in this part of the world.

There is \$600,000 for the Kaniva nature precinct, giving people who are travelling between Adelaide and Melbourne a reason to stop and see the beautiful flora and fauna that we have in our part of the world.

Country people deserve funding allocated to build infrastructure. Country people contribute so much and often ask so little. The two biggest sleeper issues that the Australian community is confronting at the moment are housing affordability and transport congestion—where people are getting frustrated and angry about waiting for trains that are full. I think investing in regional Australia is part of the answer if we are going to build an Australian society where people have (a) the opportunity to buy a house and (b) the freedom to live where they do not have to spend hours and hours commuting. Our National Stronger Regions Fund is delivering some of that infrastructure.

I find it quite ironic to hear members opposite come in here and criticise the fund but talk about the projects that they were able to deliver in their own electorates under this fund. That, to me, says this fund is being administered properly; the Auditor-General is overseeing the administration of this fund. It means that the rollout of funds in our regions has been on both sides of the political spectrum.

Really, this is the Australian people's money. It deserves to go back to the Australian people to build the society they want, and to recognise that regional Australia contributes to our electricity, our food, our natural gas, our iron ore and our coal, and to the Australian standard of living that we all enjoy. It is very reasonable that they have an allocated fund to build the infrastructure they need so they can have the quality of life that all Australians expect and demand.

Ms KEAY (Braddon) (11:51): It is pleasing to hear that some areas of the country are receiving support through this program, but this program clearly demonstrates—and the subsequent election result in Tasmania clearly demonstrated—that the Abbott-Turnbull government has given up on my state of Tasmania. Out of a total of 229 projects over three rounds, Tasmania received funding for eight projects. Out of a total of \$632 million expended so far, Tasmania received \$17 million. I know there are a number of projects that went through Stronger Regions funding many times but were not funded.

In round 1, I welcomed the funding of the Devonport City Council's Living City project, which received \$10 million. I was an alderman on the council from the inception of that project and so it was especially pleasing that that project received \$10 million, but it was only one out of three projects in Tasmania to be funded. In round 2, my electorate received nothing. There were three projects in Tasmania which received \$767,000 out of \$293 million. In round 3 it was welcome news that the Circular Head Community Wellbeing Centre received funding. The only reason it was funded was, in my opinion, that, in the lead up to the federal election, federal Labor committed funding of \$4 million towards that project; the coalition and that then Liberal member only came in behind us to fund it. That project is really important infrastructure for quite a remote regional community which had no assets—its pool had to close down.

Having said that, nothing, however, has been allocated to the electorates of Franklin and Denison. How many electorates have missed out? How many MPs on the other side were really fighting for their electorates? It is an incredibly disappointing result for Tasmania and particularly after the global financial crisis which hit Tasmania late and hard. Councils were doing all they could to ramp up projects to get them ready for funding to drive jobs in the economy. But this is all we got. I think it is absolutely deplorable that the government can freeze indexation on the financial assistance grants for councils—and that all so hit Tasmania particularly hard with a population of 500,000 and 29 councils. You have to ask: how serious is this government in looking after regional Tasmania? I really do have to question that—it is absolutely deplorable.

There was one project which went through the Stronger Regions funding three times—at every round they put in an application—and that was the Burnie Tennis Centre. The Burnie Tennis Club hosts the Burnie International every year, and they needed \$400,000 from the federal government to help reseal their tennis courts so that they could keep the Burnie International Tennis Tournament. For a small city which lost so many jobs when Caterpillar moved some of its manufacturing overseas, it was really important that the million dollars of economic activity was retained through the funding. The club did receive some funding from the state government, the Burnie City Council and Tennis Australia, but the federal member at the time could not bring himself to support the project. He said that it was not the federal government's responsibility to fund a council-owned asset. I find that absolutely ridiculous. The project went through Stronger Regions three times. If you think about all the projects in Stronger Regions that were funded, 74 per cent of those were council-owned assets. So in Tasmania we had previous members who are no longer in this place but while they were they did not really fight for their regional communities through a program which is there for regional communities. The results speak for themselves.

What is going to happen now? It is good to see that Stronger Regions has expended \$14 million or so in my electorate, but now that the program is changing cities will no longer be funded. I know the member for Denison will be pushing for funding for the City of Hobart which is now included in the next iteration of this program. I know people in my electoral will not be too happy about that. Nevertheless the process hopefully is based on merit and, hopefully, we will see more funding come to regional communities in Tasmania.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent): The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

COMMITTEES

Joint Select Committee on Government Procurement

Membership

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Broadbent) (11:57): Mr Speaker has received a message from the Senate acquainting the House that Senator Bernardi has been discharged from the Joint Select Committee on Government Procurement and that Senator Bushby has been appointed a member of the committee.

BILLS**Parliamentary Entitlements Legislation Amendment Bill 2017****Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority Bill 2017****Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority (Consequential Amendments)
Bill 2017****Treasury Laws Amendment (Bourke Street Fund) Bill 2017****Returned from Senate**

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

Building and Construction Industry (Improving Productivity) Amendment 2017**Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority 2017****Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority (Consequential Amendments)
2017****Parliamentary Entitlements Legislation Amendment 2017****Competition and Consumer Amendment (Country of Origin) 2017****Corporations Amendment (Life Insurance Remuneration Arrangements) 2017****Corporations Amendment (Professional Standards of Financial Advisers) 2017****Hazardous Waste (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Amendment 2017****Hazardous Waste (Regulation of Exports and Imports) Levy 2017****Migration Amendment (Character Cancellation Consequential Provisions) 2017****Offshore Petroleum and Greenhouse Gas Storage Amendment (Petroleum Pools
and Other Measures) 2017****Privacy Amendment (Notifiable Data Breaches) 2017****Statute Update (A.C.T. Self-Government (Consequential Provisions)
Regulations) 2017****Assent**

Messages from the Governor-General reported informing the House of assent to the bills.

BUSINESS**Suspension of Standing and Sessional Orders****Mr SHORTEN** (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (11:58): I seek leave to move the following motion:

That so much of the standing orders be suspended as would prevent the Leader of the Opposition introducing immediately a bill for an Act to amend the *Fair Work Act 2009*, and for related purposes, the bill being given priority over all other business for passage through all stages, and if consideration of the bill has not concluded by 4.30 pm on Monday, 27 February 2017, any necessary questions to complete consideration of the bill being put without delay.

Leave not granted.

Mr SHORTEN: Today I am offering the Prime Minister the chance to work with us to work with us to protect penalty rates and the take-home pay of hard-working Australians. I am offering the Prime Minister the opportunity to fix penalty rates on a bipartisan basis with no political rancour.

I know the government are busy worrying about each other, but Labor are here because we are concerned with the conditions of up to 700,000 of our fellow Australians and having their take-home pay cut. We believe that standing orders should be suspended so that we can vote to stop the cut to hundreds of thousands of Australians' take-home pay going ahead, and we want to prevent it from ever happening again in the future.

This is a chance for the Prime Minister to show some leadership. I remind him of what he said at the National Press Club only this month. He said:

We keenly understand how many families are just managing right now; the cost of everything seems to be going up much more than wages.

This is a test for the Prime Minister and the government: cooperate with Labor to protect the conditions of ordinary people or vote to cut their pay. The government can stand up for hardworking Australians or it can choose to attack us. I have a feeling about what this government will do: they will attack us rather than deal with the substantive issues. Let's be clear: a decision to not act, a decision to not remedy this decision of the Fair Work Commission, is a decision to support it. There is no playing in the traffic on this issue, there is no fence that this government can sit on, there is no table to hide under, there is no Tony Abbott to blame for this one. This is an important issue. It is an important issue. Up to 700,000 Australians in retail, hospitality, pharmacy and fast food will cop a pay cut. Ironically, the only circumstances in which they will not cop a pay cut is if they are covered by a union agreement for the time being.

Let's be clear on the consequences of what we are talking about—just facts. A full-time or part-time retail worker who will work a full eight-hour shift on a Sunday will lose up to \$77 a week. For a part-time retail employee who earns \$30,000 per year, this will be the equivalent of cutting 11 per cent of their annual income. This is a bad, bad, bad decision. It is bad for women workers, it is bad for young people, it is bad for lower and middle-income earners, it is bad for the regions, it is bad for enterprise bargaining and productivity, it is bad for confidence and consumer spending, it is actually bad for the economy, it is bad for jobs and it is certainly bad for growth.

The cut to penalty rates is straight out of Liberal economics 101. If you have a choice between giving the banks and the biggest corporations in Australia a \$50 billion pay cut or going after carers or people relying on Medicare or low-paid workers, the government always chooses the big end of town over the rest of Australia. This could not be a wage cut at a more inauspicious or poor time. Our economy is wallowing in mediocrity. Fifty-seven thousand full-time jobs have been lost in the last 12 months. We have record low wages growth and we have inequality at a 75-year high. The top 20 per cent of households in Australia now earn 12 times more than the bottom 20 per cent. The government has policies which effectively reward people for speculating on housing but punish working people with cuts to their wages. The question the government should answer is: why should the lowest paid Australians pay the price for economic change? Why should the most vulnerable bear the burden of this government's economic failures?

The Fair Work Commission acknowledged that the cut in pay would not be matched by more hours, saying:

... most existing employees would probably face reduced earnings as it is improbable that, as a group, existing workers' hours on Sundays would rise sufficiently to offset the income effects of penalty rate reductions.

They described the people who would be most affected, saying:

Many of these employees earn just enough to cover weekly living expenses, saving money is difficult and unexpected expenses produce considerable financial distress.

The government are itching to give the big end of town a tax cut, yet they stand by and do nothing as the people who serve them in the shops get a pay cut. We understand that the minimum safety net and penalty rates are an essential part of the Australian safety net. Unlike the government, we are not ashamed of having a strong and high minimum wage. Unlike the government, we are not ashamed that we have strong penalty rates. We have the strongest Medicare in the world when done properly and we have the best universal retirement income system in the world with superannuation. We do not believe that when Australia treats its middle- and working-class people among the best in the world it is a cause of national shame; it is a cause of national pride. Our opposition put in a submission defending penalty rates. Our opposition stands ready at the next hearing to again oppose this decision.

The government has form on penalty rates. More than 60 Liberals and Nationals, from the Prime Minister down, are on the record advocating for penalty rates to be cut. I did have the opportunity to study carefully what the member for Wentworth said in this place when he voted for Work Choices. He said:

You have to free the market to do its work and let the cost of setting the clearing price—be it for labour, shares, home units or loaves of bread—be as low as possible ...

The government is like the proverbial dog that has caught the truck. It now does not know what to do. Instead of doing anything about the decision, all the government is going to do is attack Labor. The problem for the government is that they are the government. Will they turn up at the hearings in March to support or oppose the decision? Will they vote for or against legislation to support the take-home pay of workers?

This is a bad decision for women workers. We have a gender pay gap in this country which is roughly 17 per cent, but these awards, covering nearly 700,000 people in retail, hospitality and fast food, are predominantly in industries that employ women, so this will exacerbate the gender pay gap. Many young people work in these industries. They are working two jobs, supporting themselves at uni or TAFE. They contribute in the economy in ways that previous generations have not had to. Australia's young pay their HECS, they pay their Medicare, they cannot get into the housing market because of the policies of this government, and now they face a pay cut when they go to work on weekends, and they get no guarantee in return: no guarantee for more hours, no guarantee for a pay rise, no guarantee for better job security. And this is bad for the regions—not that we would need to tell the Nationals about that. The regions already have a seven per cent pay gap. The average wages in the regions of Australia are seven per cent lower than the cities. If penalty rates and lower wages deliver more jobs, why is it that, even with lower wages in the regions, unemployment is what it is in the regions?

Of course, it is time for the Nationals to stand up. The problem for the Nationals is that they are so scared of One Nation that they cannot think clearly about the issues affecting their voters. Here is some free advice to the government, from the Prime Minister to the Nationals: 'If you want to beat One Nation, you don't do it by joining them. If you want to beat them, you do it not by moving to the right of One Nation. Instead, vote with us in a bipartisan fashion to stand up for these rates.'

But of course the government instead, when it has got this decision—you can just see them in Liberal Party headquarters, or 'damage control bunker' as it is affectionately known—say, 'What will we do? Do we back the decision or do we oppose the decision?' and then of course their default position is: 'No; we'll just attack Labor. We'll just call Labor names instead of dealing with the issue.'

Well, Labor will stand on its record, and we have an opportunity here for the government to stand up for penalty rates. The government think that the electorate do not like them because of Mr Abbott's and Mr Turnbull's fighting. That is not right. The real problem here is that the people of Australia do not like the government because they are so hopelessly out of touch.

The Prime Minister has and his spokespeople have sought to lecture us about the umpire's decision. Well, remember what they thought about the umpire's decision in the Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal? They were so unhappy with that umpire's decision, they sacked the umpire!

But let us be clear: we are taking this decision on penalty rates to a bigger umpire—the Parliament of Australia. And this Parliament of Australia can decide if it agrees or disagrees with the decision of the Fair Work Commission and we do not. But if this parliament, because the government has the numbers, decides to defeat protecting the take-home pay of workers' conditions, if they decide to do this and defeat our legislation, then what we will do is: we will take this decision to the biggest umpire in Australia—the people of Australia. We want to fix this with you, but if you will not join with us we will go it alone every day up to the next election. We are happy to put to the most important umpire in Australian politics, the people of Australia, our case to protect the take-home pay of the lowest-paid workers in Australia, and we will do that every day between now and the election.

The SPEAKER: Is the motion seconded?

Mr Brendan O'Connor: I second the motion and I reserve my right to speak.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (12:08): What we have heard from the Leader of the Opposition—

Mr Hill interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Bruce will leave under 94(a).

Mr TURNBULL: is yet another performance—

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister will just resume his seat for a second. The member for Bruce will leave under 94(a).

The member for Bruce then left the chamber.

Mr TURNBULL: We have heard another performance of gold-plated hypocrisy from the Leader of the Opposition, complaining about the decision of the Fair Work Commission and

wanting to set it aside. This is the man who gave them the reference in the first place! He asked them to do it. And he appointed the President. He appointed that hard-handed capitalist, that ruthless oppressor of the workers, Iain Ross, who had spent his entire career working for the Australian congress of trade unions! This is the bunch, the group that made the decision—

Mr Snowden interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Lingiari is warned.

Mr Snowden interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Lingiari has just been warned!

Mr TURNBULL: Iain Ross, appointed by the Leader of the Opposition when he was the workplace relations minister; Vice President Catanzariti, also appointed by the Leader of the Opposition; Deputy President Asbury, also appointed by the Leader of the Opposition; Commissioner Hampton, chosen by Julia Gillard; Commissioner Lee, picked by Chris Evans who was workplace relations minister—this is an independent tribunal, but one whose members were chosen by the Labor government. They considered a reference to look at penalty rates given to them by the Leader of the Opposition. Here is a question for us to ponder: when he asked them to look at penalty rates, was he assuming that penalty rates were too low and that they should be increased? Was that his plan? I do not think so! Or did he think they were just perfect? Well, if that is the case, then they need not have been looked at at all.

No; the reality is: he knew very well that there is a trade-off between the level of penalty rates and the level of the availability of jobs on weekends, and there is a trade-off invariably between penalty rates and ordinary hours. He knows all about that because he has done it himself, when he was a union leader—one deal after another: trading away penalty rates with Clean Event; Clean Event, he excluded in that deal, protected award conditions—

Opposition members interjecting—

Mr TURNBULL: They are shouting because they cannot bear the truth. The union officials opposite, and none more so than the Leader of the Opposition, have been trading away penalty rates for years and years, whether it was Clean Event or whether it was Chiquita Mushrooms—exactly the same thing. Or what about the young man who was with the Leader of the Opposition, who worked for Coles, I think, who talked about how much he was going to lose on penalty rates? And of course, sadly, there was a lack of research on behalf of the Labor Party; it turned out his EBA was not affected by the Fair Work Commission's decision at all. Why is that? Because his union had already done a deal reducing penalty rates, in return, no doubt, for other arrangements and other conditions.

This is an exercise in complete and utter hypocrisy on behalf of the Leader of the Opposition, who will say anything to suit his purpose. Let us see what he did say not very long ago: 21 April 2016. Neil Mitchell says:

... the Fair Work Commission will report soon on Sunday penalty rates. They're an independent body—
Mr Mitchell says—

in fact you had a lot to do with the way they operate now when you were Minister. Will you accept their findings given this is an independent body assessing penalty rates for Sunday, if you're Prime Minister.

SHORTEN: Yes.

He said yes.

MITCHELL: You'll accept them?

SHORTEN: Yes.

MITCHELL: Even if they reduce Sunday Penalty rates?

SHORTEN: Well, I said I'd accept the independent tribunal and that makes a big difference between us and ... the Liberals.

So right then his argument was that we were not going to accept the decision of the independent tribunal. We always said we would. He has no basis at all for this monstrous falsehood that somehow or other the decision of the Fair Work Commission is a decision of the government. It is not. He knows it is not. He has explained why it is not. He has set it up. The Leader of the Opposition owns this decision.

But it goes much further than the decision itself. We understand, all of us understand, how hard this will hit people who are working on weekends, particularly those whose work is solely on weekends. They will get less for their Sunday work. But the trade-off has been—and this is the judgement of the Fair Work Commission—that, as a consequence, there will be more hours worked and there will be more jobs in hospitality and more jobs in retail, so that, overall, workers will benefit. That is the trade-off. And that has been the trade-off in penalty rate negotiations, whether they are done by central tribunals, like the Fair Work Commission or its predecessors, or whether they have been done directly by unions in their negotiations.

There was a very wise letter written to the newspaper by Jennie George, formerly the head of the ACTU and a member in this House. She said:

I worked alongside Iain Ross for several years at the ACTU. His diligence, competence, commitment and integrity was acclaimed throughout the union movement and by all who dealt with him. After working in the legal system, his appointment as Fair Work Australia president by the then Labor government recognised the qualities and widespread experience he would bring to this important position.

Of course unions should express concern about the impact of the decision on the wages of affected workers. I am sure this weighed heavily on the FWA members, who spent years examining the submissions and witness evidence. That's why the bench has deferred consideration of the transitional arrangements to implement their decision, mindful of the potential effects on low-paid workers.

She then says:

Be careful what you wish for. Bill Shorten was right to say before the election that he would accept the decision. An independent umpire has been the bedrock of our industrial relations system and should be beyond party politics.

It is; it absolutely is. We respect the decision of the Fair Work Commission. We respect it in the same way that the Leader of the Opposition promised he would. We are told that the member for McMahon changed his mind in January after consultations. I think we know what consultations they were. They were directions. He got directions. As the director of any wholly-owned subsidiary, his shareholders called him in and he was told what to do.

This issue is vitally important to about 600,000 workers who are affected by the decision. Most workers in hospitality and retail are not affected by it, because they have EBAs of the kind negotiated by the Leader of the Opposition and many others opposite, which have already reduced penalty rates on weekends in return for other deals. But there are 600,000 workers who are affected by it, and we understand the hardship that it will cause in many of

those workers' situations. But the fundamental question is: do you or do you not have an independent Fair Work Commission that sets these rates?

Back in April last year, the Leader of the Opposition challenged the Liberal Party and the National Party to accept the verdict of the independent umpire. He said he would. We said we would. Now we discover that, just because the verdict is one that does not suit him—even though he started it, even though he staffed it and even though he defended it in advance—he walks away from it and tries to wrap himself in some sort of hero status as a champion of the people. This is yet another backflip; another exercise in hypocrisy. Nobody has traded away more penalty rates in this House than the Leader of the Opposition. This is an independent tribunal—with his people on it, with his reference and acting at his request—which he said he would respect, and he walks away from it. He has no integrity, no consistency and no commitment. *(Time expired)*

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton) (12:19): I rise to speak on this motion to suspend standing orders because this is a matter of national importance, and it is about time the Prime Minister, for once in his life, stood up for workers in this country. All we heard in that last 10 minutes was everybody else's opinion except for the Prime Minister's. We heard nothing in support of workers in this country, those hundreds of thousands of workers who will be worse off as a result of this decision. Indeed, what we have seen instead is the rank hypocrisy of the Prime Minister.

When there was an order of the independent umpire to increase the rates of pay for truck drivers, it did not take him too long to come into this place and revoke that order and indeed abolish the independent umpire. So he cannot come into this place and argue that we cannot make a change to this decision, because he did that exactly when it came to the truck drivers of this country. He did that, too, when it came to professional firefighters. In fact, this government, when it chooses to, will use this place, the parliament, to water down conditions of employment and water down rates of pay for workers in this country.

For all his working life, Bill Shorten has stood up for workers in this country. This Prime Minister only stands up for banks. In fact, this week we have a contrast in this place. We have the government introducing a tax cut of \$50 billion for banks and big business while, at the same time, the opposition is seeking to bring on a bill that will protect hundreds of thousands of workers in this country. That is the difference. That is the big difference.

The fact is that we have seen the lowest wage growth in more than 20 years in this country. Inequality is at a 75-year high. These things do matter. If the Prime Minister was in touch with what was going on, if there was any real empathy for working families who are struggling to make ends meet, you would have seen the Prime Minister join Labor and support our position to look after those families. Instead, despite the fact that there is a precedent already by this Prime Minister to intervene in an independent umpire's decision, he has chosen to turn his back on hundreds of thousands of workers in this country. That is not good enough. There are times in this place where a decision comes about and you have to stand up and decide which side you are on. Today the Prime Minister made a decision that he is not on the side of workers in this country. He has chosen instead to support this decision which will have a harsh impact on too many people.

Let me make it very clear. The opposition will continue to campaign and continue to prosecute the argument that working families deserve decent conditions of employment,

particularly at a time when there is low wage growth, when inequality is getting worse in this country and when cost-of-living pressures are such that people cannot afford to pay the rent, pay the mortgage, put food on the table or put petrol in the car. Families are struggling today as cost-of-living pressures increase, and yet we do not see any effort by the Prime Minister or this government to show concern for them. Labor, every day from this day forward until election day, will make sure that the Prime Minister wears the decision of today. He will wear this decision because, in the end, the Australian people will understand. You made a choice—he has made a choice, but it is the wrong choice, Prime Minister.

This is a very damning day for the parliament, a parliament that has already interfered with other decisions. You had an opportunity—in fact, you still have an opportunity. There is legislation being proposed by the opposition that you could support. You could join with us today. As the Leader of the Opposition said, we do not want to argue over this; we want to enlist your support to look after those workers. We are not seeing that happen today. As a result, we will see some retail workers in this country lose up to \$6,000 a year. We are going to see retail workers currently working eight-hour shifts on Sundays having to work 10-hour shifts just to get the same amount of money. That is not fair, and the Australian people know fairness and unfairness when they see it. They will never forget the Prime Minister's position on this matter today.

The SPEAKER: The time allotted for this debate has expired. The question is that the motion to suspend standing orders be agreed to.

The House divided. [12:28]

(The Speaker—Hon. Tony Smith)

Ayes66
Noes74
Majority.....8

AYES

Albanese, AN
Bandt, AP
Bowen, CE
Burke, AS
Butler, MC
Byrne, AM
Chesters, LM
Claydon, SC
Conroy, PM
Dick, MD
Elliot, MJ
Feeney, D
Freeland, MR
Giles, AJ
Hammond, TJ
Husar, E
Jones, SP
Keay, JT
Keogh, MJ
King, CF
Lamb, S
Marles, RD

Aly, A
Bird, SL
Brodtmann, G
Burney, LJ
Butler, TM
Champion, ND
Clare, JD
Collins, JM
Danby, M
Dreyfus, MA
Ellis, KM
Fitzgibbon, JA
Georganas, S
Gosling, LJ
Hart, RA
Husic, EN
Katter, RC
Kelly, MJ
Khalil, P
King, MMH
Macklin, JL
McBride, EM

AYES

Mitchell, BK
Neumann, SK
O'Toole, C
Perrett, GD (teller)
Rishworth, AL
Sharkie, RCC
Snowdon, WE
Swanson, MJ
Thistlethwaite, MJ
Watts, TG
Wilson, JH

Mitchell, RG
O'Connor, BPJ
Owens, JA
Plibersek, TJ
Ryan, JC (teller)
Shorten, WR
Stanley, AM
Templeman, SR
Vamvakinou, M
Wilkie, AD
Zappia, A

NOES

Abbott, AJ
Andrews, KJ
Banks, J
Broad, AJ
Buchholz, S
Christensen, GR (teller)
Coulton, M
Drum, DK
Entsch, WG
Falinski, J
Flint, NJ
Gee, AR
Goodenough, IR
Hastie, AW
Henderson, SM
Howarth, LR
Joyce, BT
Kelly, C
Landry, ML
Leeser, J
Littleproud, D
McCormack, MF
McVeigh, JJ
Morton, B
O'Brien, T
O'Dwyer, KM
Pitt, KJ
Prentice, J
Pyne, CM
Robert, SR
Sukkar, MS
Tehan, DT
Turnbull, MB
Vasta, RX
Wicks, LE
Wilson, TR
Wyatt, KG

Alexander, JG
Andrews, KL
Bishop, JI
Broadbent, RE
Chester, D
Ciobo, SM
Crewther, CJ
Dutton, PC
Evans, TM
Fletcher, PW
Frydenberg, JA
Gillespie, DA
Hartsuyker, L
Hawke, AG
Hogan, KJ
Hunt, GA
Keenan, M
Laming, A
Laundy, C
Ley, SP
Marino, NB
McGowan, C
Morrison, SJ
O'Brien, LS
O'Dowd, KD
Pasin, A
Porter, CC
Price, ML
Ramsey, RE (teller)
Sudmalis, AE
Taylor, AJ
Tudge, AE
Van Manen, AJ
Wallace, AB
Wilson, RJ
Wood, JP
Zimmerman, T

Question negatived.

BILLS

Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017

Second Reading

Consideration resumed of the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

Ms MACKLIN (Jagajaga) (12:35): What a contrast we see in this parliament today. During the motion to suspend standing orders, just before this bill was brought on for debate, we saw the Prime Minister prepared to support a cut to the wages of some of the lowest-income workers in this country. It is a government not prepared to support the Leader of the Opposition moving to make sure that penalty rates are protected in our nation.

Of course, the legislation in front of us today, the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017, is all about cuts for families, cuts for pensioners, cuts for young people and cuts for new parents—at the same time that this government is pursuing enormous benefits for some of the biggest companies in this country.

Labor cannot and will not support this bill today. It is fundamentally unfair. It is unfair because it rips money from the household budgets of some of the poorest Australians. It is unfair because it takes \$2.7 billion out of the pockets of families. It is unfair because it rips \$1 billion from the energy supplement, a payment that is designed to help pensioners, people with disabilities, carers and Newstart recipients with the costs of energy. This bill is unfair because it cuts paid parental leave to 70,000 new mums each and every year. This bill is unfair because it cuts support to young Australians seeking work, forcing them to live on absolutely nothing for five weeks.

This bill cannot be debated without referring to its origins—the 2014 budget. Many of the measures that have been put forward by the Liberals and Nationals in this bill have their origins in the 2014 budget—a budget so reviled by the Australian people that it has become synonymous with unfairness. Nearly three years ago, I said of those budget cuts that they:

... seek to destroy the fundamental pillars of the Australian way of life. They seek to savagely cut support for ordinary working Australian families and will push hundreds of thousands of vulnerable people into poverty.

Nearly three years later, my opinion has not changed—even if the Prime Minister has. This Liberal government just do not get it. They do not understand fairness, and they do not understand just how hard it is for ordinary Australians to manage. They do not understand what social investment means. They do not understand the need for inclusive growth that actually enables all Australians to reach their potential in life. If they did, the Liberals would not propose the measures contained in this bill.

The truth is that the Liberal Party's vision for Australia's future is about ripping up the basic social contract in this country. There is nothing visionary or reformist about forcing some of the most vulnerable Australians to accept cuts to their standard of living. The cuts in this bill are an attack on the Australian fair go. They are an attack on egalitarian Australia, an Australia that values fairness and opportunity for all. The Australia that I know says, 'If you

fall on hard times, we are going to help you back on your feet.' The Australia that Labor knows says, 'If you are sick, disabled or old, we will not abandon you and leave you to fend for yourself.' Australia is not the United States of America. We look after one another. We take care of the most vulnerable. We invest in people. We do not abandon them. We are not a nation of 'lifters' and 'leaners', no matter what Joe Hockey says. We are a generous and compassionate country that deeply values fairness.

I have people say to me, 'There isn't much of a difference any more between Labor and the Liberals.' Well, I say to those people: 'Have a look at this legislation. Remember the 2014 budget. Remember the \$8½ billion in cuts to family tax benefits that every single member opposite in the Liberal and National parties voted for. Remember the \$23 billion in cuts to the pension as a result of changes to indexation that, once again, every single member of the Liberal and National parties voted for. And remember the GP tax. That is what the Liberal Party stands for. That is what the National Party stands for. Don't tell me there is no difference in the values of the two major parties.' The Liberal government still want to rip up Australia's social contract; they just have not been able to because Labor and the community have stood up. We have opposed these cuts and we have stopped them getting through the parliament.

It is important to say that all of this is happening, as I said at the beginning of my remarks, at the same time as this government is supporting a cut to penalty rates. Of course, Labor will continue to defend the lowest paid workers in this country, many of whom will be affected by the proposed cuts to family tax benefits contained in this bill that we are debating right now. With inequality at a 75-year high in this country, wages growth at record lows and underemployment at record highs, there could not be a worse time to either cut penalty rates or cut family tax benefits.

This bill also contains cuts to paid parental leave, it contains cuts to support for young jobseekers and it will see the abolition of the energy supplement. Marie Coleman from the National Foundation for Australian Women said that the decision to slash penalty rates was: ... a fair smash at younger women and female-headed families".

... ..

"Women are ... more likely to receive minimum award wages and more likely to rely on penalty rates to meet household payments.

"When you've got that allied with the Omnibus savings bill ... it's disastrous."

She said that just the other day.

The Liberals like to say that they are committed to representing family values in this place. But, for all their talk about wanting to help families with the cost-of-living pressures, the reality is plain to see in this legislation. Their talk about supporting families was probably best exemplified by the member for Warringah back in 2013 when he put forward his rolled gold paid parental leave scheme. He said then that that was his 'Nixon goes to China' moment. Then, of course, he scrapped it. On Mother's Day 2015 the Liberals decided to crack down on what they called 'double dipping'. What an insult. They said at the time that it was better to focus on child care. That was back in 2015.

Here we are in 2017 and they still have done absolutely nothing to support those families struggling with the cost of child care, and they have certainly failed to deliver for families.

The reason for that is that they keep trying to link any improvements to the costs of child care to cruel cuts to family tax benefits. Of course, they are doing that again in this legislation. Put simply, the Liberals and the Nationals just want to rob Peter to pay Paul. With the introduction of this legislation, the government are not just holding families to ransom for child care; now they are including pensioners, young Australians and new mothers. They are holding all of them to ransom before they are prepared to do anything to help with the costs of child care.

Most recently, we have seen the Treasurer and the Minister for Social Services attempt to blackmail the Senate crossbench into passing the harsh cuts contained in this legislation, trying to hold the National Disability Insurance Scheme hostage against these unfair cuts.

Ms Burney: Shameful!

Ms MACKLIN: It is shameful. It will hurt the most disadvantaged in our society. I just want to quote a young mother who really, I think, understands this issue. This is Tanya Humphrey, whose five-year-old son Lachlan was diagnosed with autism last year. She said, 'It feels like they're holding the NDIS to ransom—that unless you are willing to take a budget cut we won't help fund therapy.' That is exactly what this government is doing. Jo Briskey from The Parenthood said, 'I hope that the Turnbull government sees that they have made a mistake here, they have made a misjudgement, and that the NDIS should be above party politics.' I certainly hope the Minister for Social Services starts listening to the views of these mothers, who really understand exactly what this government is on about. I hope that the Minister for Social Services actually takes some action to reassure people with disability that the future of the NDIS is secure and that the NDIS has nothing to do with the cuts in this bill.

I want now to go through each of the individual measures. Labor, of course, will stand up for low- and middle-income Australians, as we have done ever since this government began its attacks on them in a cruel 2014 budget. This bill attempts to cut the end-of-year supplement of \$726 per child from all families receiving family tax benefit part A with incomes below \$80,000. Although the bill introduces a \$20-a-fortnight increase to family tax benefit part A, all of these families—and this is the critical thing—will be \$200 a year per child worse off. So that is what all the Liberals and Nationals will be doing. They will be saying to all the lowest-income families in the country, 'You'll be worse off.'

The bill also cuts the end-of-year supplement of \$354 from families receiving family tax benefit part B. So that will be the end of that supplement, as well, for those families if this legislation gets through the parliament. The bill abolishes family tax benefit part B completely for single parents whose youngest child is 17 years old and still at school. It will leave those families more than \$3,000 worse off. The government actually admits that their family payment cuts will leave 1½ million Australian families worse off. As I said, families losing their family tax benefit A supplements will be worse off by \$200 for each child each year. Families receiving family tax benefit part B will lose \$350 each year. And, of course, these cuts add up. They add up for families who are already struggling to make ends meet. For example, a typical family with two children and a single income of \$60,000 will lose around \$750 a year. A couple with one child on \$75,000 will lose over \$1,000 a year. As I have already indicated, those single parents who have a 17 year old finishing school will be the worst off of all, losing over \$3,000 a year.

Over recent weeks I have received many emails from distressed families pleading for these cuts in family payments to be stopped. I will just quote from one email from a mother called Kelly. She has four children. She is living in Melbourne. She has just completed six months of chemotherapy. She will be around \$1,000 a year worse off because of this Prime Minister's cuts to family tax benefits. Kelly says that the cuts will make it very hard for her to, for example, pay for the rego on her car, which, of course, she needs to get to and from her medical appointments. There are so many families just like Kelly's. So Labor will not be supporting these unfair cuts to family payments. On the measures relating to child care that are contained in the bill, I will leave it for my colleague, the member for Adelaide, to articulate Labor's position.

The next issue that I want to go to is paid parental leave. This bill reintroduces the government's cuts to paid parental leave by placing a cap on the total number of weeks a new mother can claim if she has access to employer-funded leave. Under the previous legislation, this cap was 18 weeks. In this legislation, it is being increased to 20 weeks. Currently, primary carers of a newborn who meet the work and income tests can access up to 18 weeks of leave paid at the minimum wage—that is, \$672 a week—regardless of the leave they have access to from their employer. This bill will mean that women who have access to leave from their employer will only be able to top up this leave to a maximum of 20 weeks. Labor, of course, will continue to stand up for new mothers. By contrast, this government has called these new mothers scammers and fraudsters—working women who have bargained for paid parental, often sacrificing wage increases.

Labor will protect Australia's paid parental leave scheme. We introduced this support for new parents, which deliberately allows them to combine leave from their employer with the government scheme. It was designed to make sure that as many mothers as possible can get access to 26 weeks of leave at home with their babies, which is what is recommended by the World Health Organisation—time to allow them to bond with their baby, to breastfeed and to recover from the birth of the baby. This government wants new mothers to have less time at home with their babies, capping the scheme at 20 weeks. Nurses, teachers, police officers and retail workers would all have to return to work after 20 weeks. They are taking apart the incentive for employers to provide leave to their employees and making mothers choose between returning to work early and cutting their living standards. A new mother who had access to 10 weeks of employer leave could currently also access 18 weeks of paid parental leave paid at \$12,000, bringing her to a total of 28 weeks leave. If these changes are implemented, she could only access 10 weeks of paid parental leave through the government's scheme, bringing her to a total of 20 weeks. That is eight weeks less at home with her new baby, and she would be \$5,400 worse off. So the examples go on. 70,000 mothers will be worse off as a result of this change.

This bill also contains cuts to payments to young people. These are the most of draconian cuts of all in this legislation. The Turnbull government wants young job seekers under the age of 25 to live on absolutely nothing for five weeks. They have to wait five weeks before they can get Newstart if they cannot find a job. This measure, of course, had its origins in the 2014 budget, when the government wanted to make young people under 30 wait six months before they could access any income support. Labor opposed this then and we oppose this latest version now. It is unacceptable to abandon young people in this way. This is not about

creating incentives for young people to find work. It is not about adopting the New Zealand approach, as the government sometimes likes to assert. It is just a cruel cut to support for young people, which will push young people into hardship and poverty. How on earth can these young people pay their rent or buy food if they have absolutely nothing to live on?

Labor will also oppose the government's attempts to rip \$48 a week out of the budgets of young Australians by shifting 22- to 24-year-old job seekers from Newstart onto the lower youth allowance. This bill would also freeze for three years the income-free areas for all working age and student payments. This would mean that for three years the income tests applying to payments for single parents, job seekers and students would not keep pace with cost of living. Labor will stand up for young Australians and oppose all of these cruel cuts.

The Turnbull government also wants to abolish the energy supplement. That is also in this legislation. That is a cut of \$1 billion that will come out of the pockets of pensioners, people with disability, carers and Newstart recipients. This cut was first announced in the 2016 budget, so the Prime Minister cannot actually blame the member for Warringah for this one. If the Prime Minister gets his way, single pensioners will be \$14.10 a fortnight worse off as a result of these cuts to the energy supplement. That is around \$365 a year worse off. Couple pensioners will be \$21.20 a fortnight worse off—that is around \$550 a year worse off. This supplement was designed to help pensioners and other social security recipients with the cost of electricity and gas. Now the Turnbull government wants to scrap it.

It is quite extraordinary—the hypocrisy of a Prime Minister who is desperately trying to convince people that he actually cares about helping Australians with the cost of energy and at the same time has brought legislation into this parliament, which is in front of us right now, where he wants to scrap the energy supplement—take \$1 billion out of the pockets of pensioners. That is what this legislation will do. If the Prime Minister really believed in helping Australians with energy costs, he would immediately take this cut out of the parliament and out of the budget.

Let us be clear: this cut will have a big impact on the most vulnerable members of our community—Australians on Newstart. Labor believes that Newstart is already too low. The Newstart payment for a single person is equivalent to just 28 per cent of the average wage. If the energy supplement is abolished, someone on Newstart will be \$4.40 a week or \$220 a year worse off. ANU's David Plunkett estimates that new recipients of Newstart will be around \$3.60 a week worse off than had the energy supplement not been introduced in the first place. To put it another way, the Turnbull government is actually proposing a cut in real terms to Newstart. That is what everyone over there is going to be voting for. If you vote this, you are cutting Newstart in real terms. That is what this legislation means.

So I say to everyone in the Liberal and National parties, think very carefully about what this cut will mean to the most vulnerable Australians, who are finding it very difficult right now. Labor opposes the scrapping of the energy supplement. We do not accept that pensioners, carers, people with disability and people on Newstart should be forced to accept these cuts. This is especially so at the time when this government wants to deliver a \$50 billion cut to taxes on big business.

The Turnbull government also wants to cut the pension to around 190,000 migrant pensioners by limiting the amount of time that they can spend overseas and still get their full pension. Currently pensioners can stay overseas for 26 weeks and receive their full pension.

Following that time the pension is reduced to a rate that depends on the number of years they have resided in Australia. But the Liberals and One Nation want to change that, with a cut to the time that pensioners can spend overseas. The government's proposed cuts in this bill will mean that after just six weeks overseas pensioners who have lived in Australia for less than 35 years of their working life will have their rate of pension reduced. Labor understands that these pensioners have worked very, very hard all their lives and deserve dignity in their retirement. The last thing they need is to be treated like a burden by this Prime Minister and the Liberal Party.

The Prime Minister also wants to remove the pensioner education supplement and the education entry payment. These cuts are also in this legislation. These are small payments that go some way to supporting people on income support who start studying. The Prime Minister also wants to completely take away the pension supplement that pensioners receive; he wants to take it away from those pensioners who go overseas for more than six weeks. Labor will oppose these cuts to pensioners.

What this bill says is that the Liberals and the Nationals would rather take money from the pockets of families, pensioners, people with disability, carers, new mothers and young people than make multinationals pay their fair share of tax. They want to take food off the tables of Australian households so as to give big business a \$50 billion tax cut. Labor will not stand by and let this happen. We will fight these cuts once again. We will oppose this bill.

The Liberals seem to think that the 2014 budget was a failure because it was poorly sold. They think that the member for Warringah and the former Treasurer somehow stuffed up the PR on the 2014 budget. And somehow they think that now they have got a new salesman they can get some of these 2014 budget measures through the parliament. They just do not get the fact that the 2014 budget failed because it was unfair. It failed because it went to the heart of who we are as Australians, not because it was poorly sold. The 2014 budget was overwhelmingly rejected by the Australian people. And now, nearly three years later, this miserable excuse for a government comes back into this place and serves up the same unfair and unacceptable policies to the Australian people. Well the Australian Labor Party says no. We will not stand for this. Accordingly, I move the following amendment to the bill:

That all the words after "That" be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

The House:

(1) declines to give the bill a second reading because it will hurt pensioners, families, new mums and young Australians while holding child care assistance and the National Disability Insurance Scheme to ransom; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

(a) drop their unfair cuts to pensioners, families, new mums and young Australians; and

(b) fix their child care changes so that vulnerable and disadvantaged children are not worse off and Indigenous and country services do not face closure.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hogan): Is the amendment seconded?

Ms Burney: I second the amendment and reserve my right to speak.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: The original question was that this bill be now read a second time. To this the honourable member for Jagajaga has moved as an amendment that all words after 'That' be omitted with a view to substituting other words. If it suits the House, I will state

the question in the form that the amendment be agreed to. The question now is that the amendment be agreed to.

Mrs PRENTICE (Ryan—Assistant Minister for Social Services and Disability Services) (13:03): I rise today to speak on the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill and not in favour of the amendment. This bill is fair, reasonable and responsible and provides better targeted support to Australian families. This bill will improve the sustainability of government payments and will trigger the right levers to get more people participating in employment or onto better pathways.

This bill reintroduces the Jobs for Families Child Care Package and a range of new and previously introduced social services measures. Total savings delivered by the measures included in this bill amount to almost \$5.5 billion in net savings. These savings are critical to ensure we can provide support where it is needed most and, more importantly, to ensure we do not place our children and grandchildren into even more debt.

Close to my heart, and a topic of much debate, is paid parental leave. It is likely that many of those in this House fortunate enough to be parents, like me, were not afforded paid parental leave at the time. Many Australians with older children possibly spent less time with their newborns and did their very best to provide a stable future. Parents are now fortunate to live in a time where the government will support them during this important postnatal period and beyond. The coalition government considers that all working parents should receive paid leave to spend time bonding with their newborn or newly adopted child in those early months, and the coalition's policy and this bill will provide an important safety net for families who do not have access to employer schemes or only have access to a few weeks.

This government proposes to increase paid parental leave to 20 weeks. Our changes mean that all mothers have the opportunity to spend equal time—that is, 20 weeks—with their newborn or newly adopted child. This change means that 53 per cent of eligible mothers who do not have access to employer provided parental leave will now be able to spend an extra two weeks with their new child. We need to ensure fairness in this system so that taxpayer funded paid parental leave is sustainable and available to eligible families. Our package is aimed at providing support to those who need it most. For this reason, mothers who are entitled to employer funded parental leave will be able to access a maximum 20 weeks combined parental leave from their employers and the government. Only a very small percentage of mothers—two per cent, or 4,000 people—will not receive parental leave pay from the government because of their generous employer provided leave. That means they receive more than 20 weeks from their employers at above the national minimum wage.

I have spoken before about the unfairness in previous iterations of the parental leave scheme that results in some mothers, particularly those mothers who work in dangerous occupations or who work casually, not able to access any parental leave. This is significant. In 2011, there were 1.23 million women in casual employment. There were 109,705 women working in construction and 30,798 women in mining. I am pleased to say that this bill will ensure those mothers have better access to parental leave by reducing the work test requirements. The current work test requires mothers to work 10 of the 13 months before the birth of their child, with a maximum break of eight weeks between work days during this time. Under the changes, eligible mothers will be able to have a 12-week break between work

days in the 13 months before birth or adoption. Mothers in dangerous jobs will be able to use the hours from before they had to stop working to meet the work test.

In the past, I have received complaints from constituents about the difficulties in submitting their parental leave forms on time. The amendments in this bill relax the backdating provisions so that parents have more time to make their claim. And, importantly, we are reducing red tape for businesses. The Department of Human Services will now administer the parental leave pay and this is expected to reduce compliance costs on businesses by around \$44 million per year.

There are many young, hardworking families in my electorate of Ryan who contact my office with their concerns about the cost of child care. They are concerned because the nature of the current childcare rebate scheme prohibits them from placing their son or daughter into child care while they work or study. The childcare reforms we are introducing are the most significant reforms to the early education and care system in four decades and respond to recommendations of the Productivity Commission inquiry into child care and early childhood learning, an inquiry instigated by the coalition. The reforms are also the product of in-depth and ongoing consultation with the sector. The Jobs for Families Child Care Package demonstrates the coalition's commitment to supporting new families and new parents. Approximately one million Australian families will be better off from the coalition's reforms to make child care more affordable, more flexible and more accessible. The childcare measures create a better environment for Australian parents who want to work or who want to work more to provide a stable future for their young families. We are committed to helping families who want to get ahead by providing accessible and affordable child care so parents can go to work.

Families, particularly those on lower incomes, will feel relief from out-of-pocket childcare cost pressures. We are introducing a new childcare subsidy, which is better targeted than the current childcare benefit and childcare rebate. The subsidy will provide low-income families with 85 per cent of their childcare fees up to an hourly cap, which decreases down to 20 per cent for families with very high incomes. This subsidy is subject to a three-step activity test, which aligns the hours of subsidised care more closely with the hours of work, training or study the parents may do. The more hours parents work, train or study, the more hours of subsidised child care they will be able to access. However, we recognise that children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit most from quality early childhood education and care. So families with an income of less than \$65,000 who do not meet the activity test will still be eligible for the highest rate of subsidy. The childcare reforms will ensure the most vulnerable children get the best start in life. No child in Australia should be disadvantaged due to their family's financial situation. There will be an hourly rate cap to place downward pressure on fees and to set a benchmark, making child care more affordable for families.

Amendments in this bill will target those who work the most and earn the least. Take, for example, a hardworking family with young children living in Keperra, a suburb in my electorate. Just like many other families, they have a mortgage or pay rent, they have a car—all of the usual expenses—and of course they care for children. This family might make \$65,000 a year and, as a result of the changes contained in this package, they will now pay approximately \$15 per day for child care. This is positive relief where it hits hardest, the back pocket. We estimate that the measures in this bill will increase choice and access to child care

that will result in more than 230,000 families increasing their workforce participation. I would also like to take the opportunity to note the red tape reduction for childcare providers. The new system will be much easier for providers to navigate and will give them more time to focus on providing care for our children.

This package will improve the lives of many families, but we need to pay for it. We must find savings in the budget to fund these measures. As a fiscally responsible government, this is what we do—unlike those opposite, who continue to drive this country, our children and our grandchildren further into debt. In recognition of the increasing cost pressures facing families, this government is increasing family tax benefit part A by \$20.02 per fortnight for each child in a family up to 19 years of age. This means higher payments for 1.2 million lower income families or for 2.2 million children.

We will also provide an extra \$19.37 a fortnight for people under 18 who are on youth allowance and living at home. This aligns the payment to the FTB part A payment for a child aged 13 to 19. This change is designed to encourage high school students to stay at school. It also helps simplify our payment system. As children get older, when they study and start entering the workplace themselves, we need to support parents back to work. We are making changes so that single parent families will continue to receive FTB part A for eligible children; however, they will only receive be able to receive FTB part B until the end of the calendar year their youngest child turns 16. Single parents over 60 years of age will be exempt from this measure.

In recognition of the improvements in service delivery and technology, we are phasing out the FTB part A and FTB part B end-of-year supplements. These supplements were introduced to help families with their end-of-year reconciliation of debts. However, they are no longer needed because we now have the technology to update and verify their incomes in real time. This is another red tape reduction measure.

We are also making changes so that young people are given incentives to stay in education or work. From 1 July 2017, young jobseekers aged 22 to 24 years of age who become unemployed will receive youth allowance until they turn 25 rather than being placed onto Newstart. This means that all people under 25 will be on the same payment arrangement regardless of whether they are unemployed or studying. Youth allowance also provides young people with more flexibility to earn an income. Anyone under the age of 25 and already on Newstart or sickness allowance will be exempt from this change.

This bill also introduces other measures designed to streamline and target our welfare system. We are going to implement a trial of seasonal work incentives for jobseekers. This measure provides a social security income test incentive to increase the number of jobseekers who work in specified seasonal horticultural activities—fruit-picking et cetera. This measure responds to concerns raised by the Australian horticultural industry about attracting the right number of seasonal workers. The incentives will commence as a two-year trial from 1 July this year.

A further measure will mean that pensioners who have worked less than 35 years in Australia and who receive a pension and remain out of the country for more than six weeks will have their pension adjusted. Currently, these recipients can remain outside of Australia for 26 weeks before their pension is adjusted, regardless of whether they have worked for two years or 35 years in Australia. Now the adjustments will be proportional to the years the

pensioner has spent working in Australia. Taxpayers should not be asked to pay for pensioners to live overseas indefinitely without consideration of the time the pensioner has spent contributing to the Australian community. We will also be stopping payment of the pension supplement once a person has been overseas for more than six weeks. This payment was designed to help pensioners with their cost of living in Australia.

There are a number of other savings measures contained in this bill that help bring government payments into line with today's expectations and standards. For example, we are closing the energy supplement to new welfare recipients. The energy supplement was introduced to compensate Australians for the economy-wide carbon tax which was abolished three years ago. We are ceasing the pensioner education supplement because we now have other incentives and more appropriate programs and supports available for people who want to train or study.

In total, this bill delivers savings of almost \$5.5 billion over the forward estimates. That is what responsibility looks like. We are paying for the reforms we are making, and we are using the savings in other areas. We are not saddling future generations with a growing debt problem. The passage of this bill is critical to providing a solid and sustainable future for all Australians. This bill will provide a foundation for better productivity and participation which will improve our economy for the future.

I am pleased to be part of a strong, coalition government which, unlike those opposite, is supporting hardworking Australian mums and dads, and their families. I commend this bill to the House.

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide) (13:17): What an absolute disgrace it is that this piece of legislation is before the federal parliament. Let us be very clear. What we have before us is a slap in the face to every mother, every father and every family who has cried out and said, 'We need greater assistance when it comes to the Australian childcare system,' because what the Turnbull government is saying to every one of those families is: 'You are just not a priority for us. We cannot possibly deliver anything unless you agree, at the same time, to cuts to the assistance that is given to some of the most vulnerable Australians in our community.' That is the choice that the Turnbull government is putting forward here—that, unless you are prepared to let pensioners have it, to let new mums have it, to let low-income Australian families have it, to let young unemployed Australians have it, there can absolutely not be any childcare reform for you. Every one of those members opposite is saying that to every family in their electorate.

It is not just families that have been waiting for many, many years to see some reform in this area. This government has also made history. They actually went an entire term of parliament in which they did absolutely nothing to assist the Australian childcare system. Sorry, I should correct that—they did one thing. They introduced their absolute dud of a nanny pilot program. That is the only thing they managed to achieve when it comes to trying to help Australian families with the cost, accessibility and quality of Australian child care.

I want to say up-front that Labor absolutely wants to see more investment in early childhood education and care. Labor absolutely wants to see improvements and reforms to improve the system both for Australian parents and, importantly, for Australian children. For years, we have said that we would try and work with the government to come up with a

package that this parliament could support and see through, and it is a great pity that the government have not taken us up on that offer.

This is the third time now that we have seen these proposed changes to childcare reform. Even though Labor and many stakeholders have been pointing out the problems with these childcare reforms for more than 18 months, the government still just do not get it or they still just do not care, because what they are proposing, putting aside all the cuts and just looking at the childcare changes, will leave one in three families worse off. It takes the special kind of genius that the Turnbull government seems to possess to spend hundreds of millions of dollars to make Australian families worse off! But we should be very clear that that is exactly what the bill before the House would do.

We should also consider that this government which says it is so urgent that this bill be passed by the House because Australian families are relying on these childcare changes is the very same government that has pushed back the implementation of these changes. They will not come into effect this financial year, and they will not come into effect next financial year.

What the government have done is refused to fix the problems in their proposal, and now they are holding any childcare reform to ransom for an extended shopping list of cruel cuts—cuts to pensioners, cuts to new mums, cuts to jobseekers, cuts to lower-income families, cuts to the very Australians who can least afford to bear the burden of more cruel targeting from Malcolm Turnbull and this out-of-touch government. And isn't that a story we are hearing far too often from this government?

Let me say now what the Prime Minister will not: 1½ million families will be worse off as a result of this government's cuts to family tax benefits. There are around one million families accessing the early education system right now in Australia. This bill before the House seeks to rob Peter to pay Paul. Families on the FTB A supplement will be worse off by \$200 per child per year. Around 300,000 families losing the supplement will not receive the increase to the fortnightly rate, because they are on the base rate FTB A. They may already be struggling to make ends meet, but, according to Prime Minister Turnbull, they are the ones who must be forced to pay. They are the only ones that this government can find to target. A single-parent family on \$60,000 with a 17-year-old child in high school will be around \$3,300 a year worse off. If that is help for families, I think families would prefer the Turnbull government to just leave them alone.

On top of the family tax benefit cuts, this bill has even more cuts. It will slash paid parental leave, hurting around 70,000 new mums trying to raise their young families. We all know that the overwhelming evidence about the importance to mums but to their babies of having time in the newborn phase to spend together, to bond and to breastfeed. Other cuts include: ripping away energy supplements to pensioners, to Newstart recipients, to people with disabilities and to carers; pushing young people onto lower bands of Youth Allowance; scrapping the Pensioner Education Supplement and the Education Entry Payment; and stopping the pension to migrant pensioners who spend more than six weeks overseas. These are the proposals that the government speakers are not going to stand up and talk about, but these are the very real impacts that this legislation would have.

Linking their proposed childcare changes to these cuts is not only unfair—they are not even needed. Arthur Sinodinos, Malcolm Turnbull's right-hand man, said it best and most honestly when he admitted that the link between these cuts and the childcare reforms was for

purely political purposes. At least he was up-front about it—more than any of the government speakers in this House are going to be. It is also important to remember that Labor has already supported over \$6 billion in saving measures, which we saw as fair. We do not pretend that early childhood education comes free of charge; we just think that the government is charging the wrong people here. Just today in the media we have seen the government announce that it will finally be acting on rorting in Family Day Care and expecting to save another \$250 million, which could be redirected back into the childcare system. That could mean that \$250 million is not required in cuts to vulnerable Australians, but they have not amended the bill to do that. This is on top of close to \$1 billion in savings that they have already made through changes to Family Day Care rules, changes which were supported by this side of the chamber.

Let's call it out for the rubbish that it is—that these cuts to vulnerable Australians are needed in order to deliver reform to child care is simply not the case. It is government spin and it is purely for political purposes. Of course, government is about priorities, but this government is saying that families are not a priority of theirs and that early childhood education and care is not priority of theirs. Yet, funnily enough, they have a priority to spend \$50 billion on corporate tax cuts for multinational companies. You do not see them coming in here and talking about the need for cuts to fund that, because it is a priority of theirs and they can find the money for that, but child care is not.

We know that the government thinks that the only way they can pay for child care is by making lower- and middle-income Australians pay for it, but that does not stack up. Labor will stand up and call out that lie; and we will fight for the families that we represent. The government has also admitted to a significant reduction in the cost of their own policy. When they reintroduced their childcare changes in September last year, their election material and their campaign newsletters talked about their \$3 billion childcare reform package. They repeated this claim in the media and in all of their backbenchers' newsletters, but the documents now before this parliament are showing that they are only investing half of what they initially promised into their childcare changes. Investment has dropped to just \$1.6 billion. But does this mean that they have abandoned the cuts to pensioners, the cuts to the unemployed, the cuts to families, the cuts to new mums? No, of course not. It is just another example of this government being cruel and tricky.

Let's be very clear: this is not a plan to help families, and the government knows it. The only plan is to rip money from household budgets across Australia whilst giving tax breaks to big multinationals and, of course, to the banks. Labor cannot and will not support this bill, not just because of its farcical links to family tax benefit cuts. It is not just because parents would not see any relief when it comes to the childcare system until mid-2018, but it is also because there are details in these changes that have long caused us great concern. As I have made clear, we want to see improvements to the childcare system. We will support government measures to streamline, to improve and to simplify the system, but these proposals also include measures like threats to Indigenous and remote child care services and like the unfair activity test which would have a detrimental effect on some of the children who most need this parliament to stand up and fight for them.

There is nothing new about these problems. They have been exposed by two Senate inquiries; they have repeatedly been pointed out by Labor; they have been raised by early childhood experts and the sector. Proposing a package with such serious flaws once could

possibly be considered as a mistake, but to introduce a bill three times in a row shows that the Liberals simply do not care about the most vulnerable children in Australia. It is shameful that each one of the government speakers will come in here and not once will they try to justify why they will threaten the viability of Indigenous services—why it is that they will see some of the remote regional services shutdown as a result of these proposals and why it is that they will cut the access of disadvantaged Australian children to early childhood education as a result of these measures.

We know that the government's proposed childcare changes will negatively impact Indigenous children—children who already have lower early education enrolment rates than the average in every state and territory. We are also worried about the impact on mobile services that serve families and children in Australia's rural, remote and regional communities. These are services that families rely upon and that are the only way those children have access to early childhood education. The government's package will scrap the budget-based funded program that provides subsidies to services. They have not been able to explain how pushing 300 Indigenous and mobile providers into so-called mainstream funding arrangements will work and they have not been able to guarantee that these services will not be forced to close. There is a very good reason they will not give that guarantee. We know that the services provide education to around 20,000 children, many of whom come from the most vulnerable and marginalised groups in our society. For Indigenous children Labor will stand up and fight. We will stand up and say that we cannot support a package which would see more money going towards the childcare system and less money going towards the most disadvantaged and vulnerable children in Australia. It is immoral to turn our focus away from the children who need this parliament to stand up and fight for them the most. We know the Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care has warned that:

These changes will diminish our kids potential to make a smooth transition to school compounding the likelihood of intergenerational disempowerment and unemployment. Children will fall behind before they have even started school and they will suffer greater risk of removal into out-of-home care.

That is what we will be voting on in this parliament.

The second major concern that Labor has is with the government's proposed activity test for subsidised care. The introduction of the new complicated test would remove the current entitlement of all children in Australia to have access to two days of early education. We know that this test—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Coulton): The debate is interrupted in accordance with standing order 43. The debate may be resumed at a later hour, and the member for Adelaide will be given an opportunity to continue speaking at that time.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Attorney-General

Mr KEOGH (Burt) (13:30): The disgrace that is the Turnbull government only got worse at the end of last week when the Commonwealth Attorney-General was outed by his Western Australian counterpart and fellow Liberal for misleading the Senate. Senator Brandis has form when it comes to being clever and weaselly with words, but it was evident on Friday that Senator Brandis has misled the Senate about when he became engaged in the deal between the Commonwealth and WA government to see the Commonwealth put behind other creditors,

and especially the state of Western Australia in the division of assets arising from the liquidation of Bell Group.

The Bell Group legislation in Western Australia was a blatant attempt by the WA government to use a legislative sledgehammer to resolve ongoing litigation because it feared it would miss out—needing cover for a gaping budget black hole, thanks in part to the member for Peace, that it is leaving to the people of Western Australia, so much so it even cut a secret deal with the Commonwealth to allow it to work. Fortunately, independent legal officers in the Commonwealth had more metal than the Attorney-General. While it is always a disgrace for a minister of the Crown to mislead a house of parliament, it is doubly so when the minister is the Attorney-General, the first law officer of the nation. I would say we expect higher standards of government, but the reality is that, with its track record for truthiness and the litany of obfuscations by Senator Brandis, such misleading of the Senate is now no surprise.

Petrie Electorate: Broadband

Mr HOWARTH (Petrie) (13:31): The NBN rollout is fast gathering steam, with one in three Australian homes now having access and being well underway throughout my electorate of Petrie. In fact, in North Lakes and parts of Mango Hill and Griffin, it will be switched on imminently—in fact, this weekend—in probably east of Discovery Drive in North Lakes and parts of Mango Hill. Now is the time to consider the best plan for you. Connection, of course, is via a range of service providers, so choose carefully when determining the speed you need and how much data you need to download. Do not forget, the NBN is more than just broadband. It is your landline as well, so do not jump the gun. This means that, for businesses, EFTPOS, fire alarms, lifts and ATMs will all be part of it. Arrange connection of your new service before switching off the old one. Keep an eye on your mailbox for a letter from nbn outlining everything you need to know, and please prepare to be patient. Nbn tells me connecting this particular area is a mammoth task. It is likely that many will want to connect at once. Be assured that all will be moving as fast as they can. At peak, a new home or business is forecast to be connected every three seconds, which I think is a stellar result.

Warlike Service

Mr WILKIE (Denison) (13:33): I am disgusted with the government's continuing inaction on the reclassification of some peacekeeper service from non-warlike to warlike. I asked the Prime Minister in question time on 18 October last year about the case of Ray Williams and his horrid peacekeeper experience in Lebanon in 1983 and 1984. Ray was shot at and shelled but had no weapon, body armour or support. He suffers PTSD and has been fighting for 18 years to have his service recognised as warlike. I was assured by the PM that the relevant Defence review would be completed last year, but here we are at the end of February and still nothing has happened. I can only assume the government is morbidly hoping that the vets dying of old age will resolve the matter. The madness of this situation is reflected in Defence's own report which describes the environment in which Ray served as:

... exposed to both operational and environmental risks, such as collateral damage, criminal assault, kidnapping (for hostage or other purposes), rocket and artillery attacks, mines and unexploded ordnance, IEDs, direct military attack, psychological injury and fatigue, and disease.

This episode makes a mockery of any claim by the government that they care about veterans. It needs to be sorted and it needs to be sorted now.

Swan Electorate: BARBECURE

Mr IRONS (Swan) (13:34): If you throw your mind back to last year on 23 November, we had a BARBECURE event in the Senate quadrangle. It was a bit of a wet and miserable day, but it was a day where their staff convinced me to hold a BARBECURE in my electorate of Swan. On the Friday evening of the last sitting week, I and the state member for Belmont, Glenys Godfrey, held a BARBECURE event in Swan. BARBECURE is a fantastic fundraising initiative of Cure Cancer Australia that aims to raise awareness and vital funds to help find a cure for cancer. For 50 years, Cure Cancer Australia has been leading the way in funding cancer research and to date has funded over 483 research grants to more than 316 individual researchers.

This year alone, 120,700 people will be diagnosed with cancer in Australia. More than 820 people lose their battle with cancer each week here in Australia. That is 117 people dying each and every day in Australia. These are devastating statistics which have seen many families and individuals in our communities greatly affected by cancer. That is why I teamed up with Glenys to host our own BARBECURE event to do our part for such an important cause. It was great to have so many of our constituents coming down and enjoying a wonderful evening on the river foreshore of Garvey Park in Ascot. I would like to thank everyone who did come along for their support. I am proud to advise the House that our BARBECURE raised over \$500, all of which has gone to Cure Cancer Australia. Cure Cancer Australia, keep up the great work that you are doing.

Workplace Relations

Ms HUSAR (Lindsay) (13:36): Last week, low-paid workers around this country were hit with a shocking decision that will see the take-home pay of 700,000 working people slashed right across this country. Considering that wages in Australia have been stagnant ever since this government was elected, the decision is a kick in the guts to working people who are already struggling to get by. How is that jobs and growth going? Seven hundred thousand people will have their pay cut, every one of them losing hard earned and much needed income. That is a significant cut to the take-home pay of those affected and it will certainly lead to working people being unable to afford to make ends meet. For the life of me, I have tried but I just cannot understand why low-paid workers are always in the firing line of this cruel Liberal government. They have refused to stand up for working people time and time again, and they could not be bothered to lift a finger to assist low-paid workers. They are arrogant and out of touch and would rather give \$50 billion to big businesses and the big four banks than stand up for working people and their hard-won and well-earned pay and their conditions.

Working people in my electorate of Lindsay will be particularly affected by this bad decision. We have a large number of retail and hospitality workers in Western Sydney, and reports in *The Sydney Morning Herald* yesterday named my community as one of the worst hit by this cut. Labor will not sit by and let this happen to hardworking Australians. This government is like a mob of termites at a log party, carving out penalty rates for working people in this country.

Honourable members interjecting—

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Coulton): Order! Members are not going to turn this into a shouting match. Any more of that and there will be evictions.

Youth Jobs PaTH Program

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (13:37): Last week I had the great pleasure of hosting our employment minister, Senator Michaelia Cash, to launch a key part of the PaTH—Prepare, Trial, Hire—Program to get young people aged 15 to 25 into the workplace. The minister is doing a fantastic job of tackling the issue of youth unemployment, and I commend her on her efforts in listening carefully to how important business, especially small business, are in giving young people a start in the workforce.

During the visit, the minister met with several small businesses in Sutherland and spoke at length with one small business person, Cafe 2232's proprietor George Papadopoulos, about his past difficulties in employing young people. George and his daughter Lizzie, who also helps out in the business, told the minister that, while employers were keen to employ young people, they were often presented with candidates who did not have the required skills to get a start. This is where the PaTH—Prepare, Trial, Hire—Program will offer young people the opportunity to secure an internship with a business so they can learn vital skills to help them get a job. The program will fund financial support to both the young person and the business during the internship, as well as financial support where the business employs a young person.

This is the coalition getting on with the job of increasing employment in this country, giving more and more young people the opportunity to get into the workforce. This is an excellent program, and I commend the minister for her work on this.

Workplace Relations

Ms TEMPLEMAN (Macquarie) (13:39): The decision to cut penalty rates for hospitality, retail, fast-food and pharmacy workers is a horrible blow to the 700,000 low-paid workers who rely on them. We have not seen a decision like this before, where there is a real cut to wages of some of their lowest earners, and no-one could have imagined it. It comes at a time when we have the lowest wage growth in 20 years and the greatest inequality. What the decision says is that, if you are a low-income retail worker, your Sundays are no longer important to you, your family or your friends. You do not count, but everybody else either does not work on a Sunday or gets full penalty rates.

This will hit hardest the young. It will hit women. It will hit the regions. The economic danger is that, if you take money out of the pockets of low-paid workers, you are taking it out of the economy. The lower your pay, the more likely you are to need to spend it all on food, on rent, on petrol and on bills, and this pay cut means people will struggle just to cover the necessities. So it is local businesses in regional areas who will feel the brunt of the loss of disposable income. Remember: the argument from the Liberals pushing for penalty rate cuts has been, 'This will lead to more jobs,' but in fact it is just going to lead to workers having to work extra hours. This is a decision that will hurt workers and their families. It is a decision that will hurt local economies. And it is a bad decision.

Schools

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (13:41): Now is a great opportunity to recognise high-gain schools in Queensland. The nomenclature for performance is moving from just counting top

scores to identifying the student path and the student gain over time. I want to recognise those schools.

If you are at a state school, you want to be in Townsville. I want to recognise Thuringowa State High School, who were the first and highest-gain school in Queensland in 2016, very closely followed by two schools that are always in the top echelon: Townsville and Kirwan state high schools. But Townsville is blessed to have three incredible state schools in their city.

The Sunshine Coast has the strongest independent schools in Queensland, and to have a cluster of such quality that they come in the top 36, all of them, out of the total of 174 independent schools state-wide—Matthew Flinders Anglican College, St Andrew's Anglican College, Glasshouse Christian College, Good Shepherd Lutheran College, Coolum Beach Christian College, all in the top 40—is extraordinary. Of state schools in that area, Burnside, Kawana Waters, Maroochydore and Caloundra state high schools were all in the top half.

Toowoomba is also blessed with probably the strongest independent Catholic and state schools: Toowoomba Grammar School came second out of all GPS schools, and St Mary's College, always on top in Toowoomba, came 12th on this occasion. I also note that Stanthorpe State High School is doing extraordinarily well.

On the Gold Coast, Assisi Catholic College, Kooralbyn International School, Tamborine Mountain College, and Nerang, Elanora and Tamborine Mountain state high schools— (*Time expired*)

Workplace Relations

Dr FREELANDER (Macarthur) (13:42): I have run a small business in the Macarthur electorate for over 30 years. My employees were all women with young families, and I know how much they and their families depended on their take-home pay, and how much difference what was a small amount of money could make to their lifestyles, including their ability to service their mortgages and allow their children to take part in sport.

Last Thursday's Fair Work Commission decision brings to a head a 30-year period of conflict over the issue of penalty rates. Over 700,000 workers will suffer a large pay cut of up to \$80 a week—perhaps even more. The decision was made by an expert and rightly independent panel, but it is one with which I profoundly disagree.

The Fair Work Commission decision affects us all. It will make home affordability, family lifestyles and children's lives profoundly different. It affects us all on so many levels. It will flow on, undoubtedly, to other lowly-paid workers. It is a further entrenchment of the slow but steady polarisation of our society.

Australians have every right to expect that the parliament will discharge its role in protecting the common good. It is open to the government to ask the Fair Work Commission to stay its decision.

Over a full life, most of us will experience many workplaces and follow many callings. We deserve fairness and we deserve fair pay. (*Time expired*)

Capricornia Electorate: Commonwealth Bridges Renewal Program

Ms LANDRY (Capricornia—Deputy Nationals Whip) (13:44): I am pleased to report that work is underway to replace four old timber bridges along the Peak Downs Highway west of

Walkerston, in the northern part of Capricornia. This is expected to create an average of 114 jobs. The Turnbull-Joyce government is providing \$35 million towards the \$70 million project under the Commonwealth Bridges Renewal Program.

The bridge replacement work comes on top of the \$166 million in federal government funding being spent to realign the notorious Eton Range section of the Peak Downs Highway, to reduce heavy vehicle accidents and fatalities. Under the Bridges Renewal Program, four old timber bridges are being replaced with new concrete structures to make it safer to travel in that area. The new bridges will cross Fiery Creek, Lonely Creek, Boundary Creek and Cut Creek. This is the largest investment in an individual package of works under the Commonwealth Bridges Renewal Program.

People who travel on country roads deserve good facilities just as much as those who travel in major cities, and I am proud to have helped facilitate this funding. Work is expected to be completed in 2018.

Workplace Relations

Mr STEPHEN JONES (Whitlam) (13:45): This morning, the Prime Minister had the opportunity to stand up for low-paid workers. He failed the test. He failed the 42,000 workers in retail, in hospital and in food in my electorate and over 70,000 workers around the country who rely on penalty rates for their take-home pay. In this place we call them penalty rates, but the people who earn them just call it money in their pocket—money to pay for their groceries, money to pay for their food, money to pay for their power, money to put petrol in their car, money to pay for their kids' school shoes et cetera. This is what it means to these workers.

Every day in government is an opportunity to make choices and priorities. It is an opportunity for us to say who we are. This morning the Prime Minister said that he was on the side of big business, championing the \$50 billion worth of tax cuts, instead of being on the side of the people who are earning \$670 a week. Turnbull said this morning that he knew that it was going to hurt those people.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Coulton): Order! The member for Whitlam will refer to members by their correct title, thank you.

Mr STEPHEN JONES: The Prime Minister said that knew that this decision was going to hurt workers. But what is he going to do about it? It is time for him to get behind the Labor bill, because, if you know that you are doing something that is going to hurt, it is your obligation to do something to fix it.

Berowra Electorate: NorthConnex

MATES in Construction

Mr LEESER (Berowra) (13:47): Last Thursday, I visited the NorthConnex training hub in my electorate. NorthConnex is the missing link in our national transport system. Funded by the federal and state coalition governments in partnership with Transurban, NorthConnex will take 5,000 trucks off Pennant Hills Road every day. NorthConnex will significantly reduce air and noise pollution and return our local streets to the local community.

But this was no regular visit to NorthConnex. I had the privilege of participating in a general awareness training course run by Carolyn Kelso and Heather Drew, from Mates in Construction. Last year, I met Peter McClelland, CEO of MATES in Construction NSW.

MATES in Construction was established in 2008 to reduce the high level of suicide among Australian construction workers. In 2015, 54 per cent of people who died by suicide were men aged 25 to 64. The rate of suicide in the construction industry is alarmingly high: 71 per cent higher than in any other industry. Between 2001 and 2013, there was an average of 182 deaths per year, or one suicide every second day in the industry.

MATES in Construction raises awareness of mental health issues in the construction industry by training workers to recognise the signs. They also provide support to workers, including case management and on-site visits by field officers. Since 2015, more than 400 NorthConnex staff have undergone this training. These workers will apply these skills to their work today and at future worksites. I commend the work of MATES in Construction, LendLease Boris and NorthConnex.

Workplace Relations

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (13:48): Margarita Murray-Stark has worked as a room attendant in some of the most expensive hotels in Melbourne for over 30 years, and she has worked every Sunday. When she was widowed, her Sunday penalty rate and her public holiday penalty rate helped pay for her children's expenses. They helped her through the most difficult period of her life. But this government is doing nothing to help Margarita or many of her co-workers. This government, when given the opportunity this morning to stand with Labor, refused to let us move a motion that would call on the Fair Work Commission to stop their cut to take-home pay.

The Fair Work Commission's decision to cut take-home pay, to cut the penalty rates, of some of Australia's lowest paid workers is cruel. It is a body-blow to people trying to survive on penalty rates. This is a government not willing to stand with our lowest paid workers but willing to give our highest paid workers, including themselves a tax cut. Last year in the budget they gave themselves a tax cut, but they are refusing to reverse decisions that see our lowest paid workers cop a pay cut. This is a government willing to give big business a tax cut but not willing to stand with low-paid workers who will be hit with a pay cut. These are the priorities of this government, the Liberal-National government. They care little for workers and move about themselves and their mates in big business. *(Time expired)*

Maranoa Electorate: Longreach State High School

Mr LITTLEPROUD (Maranoa) (13:50): Today I rise to acknowledge the incredible results of the Longreach State High School. Proving that the tyranny of distance is not an issue, especially when the principal is as dedicated and committed as Ms Lesley Andrews, in 2016, 62.5 per cent of the school's year 12 students received an OP score between one and five. From my visits to the school, I have seen firsthand the sheer passion, determination and enthusiasm for learning from Ms Andrews and her team. Secondly, it is most important for me to acknowledge the students, who, despite bearing the effects of prolonged drought, have still managed to achieve these fantastic results. These results reiterate to me that outcomes are not necessarily tied to money or proximity to cities, but rather are determined by the hardworking people in the schools who make it their mission to encourage young minds to work hard and reap the rewards. The school has asked that I read this message for them:

Longreach State High School is very proud of our Year 12 students' results from last year.

It is a testament both to the hard work of our students and the hard work of all of our staff. 62.5% of our OP eligible students received an OP1-5, which placed Longreach SHS as the top school in the state, across all sectors.

In addition, 100% of our Year 12 students from last year received a QCE ...

The P&C would also specifically like to acknowledge and thank Ms Andrews and her team of fantastic teachers for their contribution to the outstanding result, which has not only been a boost of morale for the school, but for the entire town.

(Time expired)

Workplace Relations

Ms RYAN (Lalor—Opposition Whip) (13:51): Those opposite like to see themselves as good economic managers. That is the myth that they put out. Today, the Prime Minister's refusal to support the legislation put forward to protect the penalty rates of Australian workers killed that myth. That one is gone. This penalty rates decision, and this government's decision not to support us to protect 700,000 workers across the country who will see their wages cut, calls this government out for what it is. I note today's *Sydney Morning Herald* shows the top 10 electorates that will be affected. There are no surprises—the electorate of Lalor, my community, is in that top 10, along with the electorate of Rankin. The electorates of Rankin and Lalor have a lot in common, including high youth unemployment and a casualisation of the workforce. This failure to protect penalty rates for workers is going to devastate our local economies. Young people are being moved off Newstart onto youth allowance; now young people are going to lose penalty rates. For the small businesses in our community, that means there will be spending cuts. These are not the sorts of spending cuts those opposite like to talk about; they have managed to cut the spending of locals in my electorate. That will mean damage to local businesses in my electorate.

Groom Electorate: Defence Housing

Dr McVEIGH (Groom) (13:53): The Defence Housing Authority has announced plans for a new development in the north-east area of Toowoomba, on the edge of the escarpment, the site of a historic rifle range, bounded by Rifle Range Road, Martini Street and Henry Street. It was previously under the control of the Australian Defence Force. I encourage neighbours and all interested parties to have a say in the consultation process, which will continue for some time. DHA has commenced discussions with the Toowoomba Regional Council, just like any other body would do in order to seek a development approval. As the local member and a former neighbour of this site, I would like to say that it will not be a massive development, as some have suggested. I understand this site is about 350 hectares, with two-thirds of that over the edge of the range. Only 30 to 40 per cent would likely be for Defence housing, with the rest on the public market. It has an interesting history, having been a police horse paddock early last century. Development would address unexploded ordnance concerns and Defence families are welcome and valued in our community. A Moreton Bay fig was planted on the site 100 years ago by the late Eric French as a war memorial, and I am working with DHA to preserve it. Locals are keen on Jubilee Park expansion, mountain bike tracks, improved fire trails and tourism escarpment walks. The area has already been developed to the south and the north-west, so this should come as little surprise. No plans have been lodged at this stage, so now is the time for locals to engage through the consultation processes that are underway and have their say.

Workplace Relations

Mr HAMMOND (Perth) (13:54): I rise to join my colleagues to condemn this government and this Prime Minister for their sheer, rank indifference to the penalty rate cut, which will affect pharmacy workers, retail workers, fast-food workers and hospitality workers. Let us look at what this means to mums and dads in my great state of Western Australia. The numbers are stark. Tens of thousands of mums and dads will be affected in their hip pockets because of this cruel and heartless cut to penalty rates, to which this government is squibbing on any meaningful response. In my electorate, just go down any of the streets that pulse through my community of Perth—Beaufort Street, Angove Street or Fitzgerald Street—and ask those workers what a one-quarter cut to their pay on Sundays will mean to their ability to run a budget. How out of touch is this government, with the Prime Minister saying that these cuts are modest. Try telling that to the mums and dads carefully planning a budget around their penalty rates.

If that is not enough, the Premier of Western Australia, Colin Barnett, is calling penalty rates unfair and says he expects a backlash from unions. Well done to those unions who have run the campaign protecting penalty rates—the SDA and United Voice. Colin Barnett expects a backlash from the unions? My message right now to Colin Barnett is: Sunshine, that is nothing like the backlash you are going to get on election day from the community and all those workers being hurt. Western Australians should vote that state government out. *(Time expired)*

Tangney Electorate: Willetton Basketball Stadium

Mr MORTON (Tangney) (13:56): Willetton Basketball Stadium is home to one of the most successful basketball associations in Perth, with 300 teams and 3,500 players supported by over 1,000 volunteers. The stadium not only services the young people throughout my electorate but also attracts kids from far beyond. The state Liberal government has committed \$3.5 million towards four more indoor courts, new change rooms, meeting rooms, a hall, offices and space for supporting health services. The state Liberals' commitment represents one-third of the total project costs. What great news this is. Over 150 kids on the waiting list who want to play basketball but cannot due to a lack of infrastructure are now one step closer to playing a team sport. Congratulations to the Chairman of the Willetton Basketball Association, Mr Phil Nixon, and his army of passionate volunteers, who have worked tirelessly to engage the community, fundraise and bring awareness to this important project. I give thanks to my state Liberal colleague, Dr Mike Nahan, who has been working for eight years to get this project partially funded by the state government. But this will not get done unless the full cost of the expansion project is found. That is why I am determined to find a federal contribution to this very important project. I wish the Willetton Tigers all the very best for the upcoming SBL season and their first game against the Mandurah Magic on 18 March.

Workplace Relations

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton) (13:57): The Prime Minister had an opportunity today to stand up for workers and chose not to, but, whilst low-paid workers in this country are going to suffer as result of the decision that was made and the failure by the government to respond, it is important to note the proportion of women in these sectors of the economy who will be affected. Women are disproportionately represented in the retail and hospitality

industries, are more likely to receive minimum award wages and are more likely to rely on penalty rates to meet household payments. So, while it is the case that hundreds of thousands of workers will be worse off, a much greater proportion will be women. Under the hospitality award and the retail award, around 55 per cent are women. Seventy seven per cent of workers under the pharmacy award are women. The Fair Work Commission has also left the door open for a review of the hair and beauty award, and 87 per cent of that workforce are women. So, whilst this is a very harsh decision for many low-paid workers, it is particularly harsh for women in workplaces across the country. In fact, it will increase the gender gap in workplaces across Australia unless the Prime Minister chooses to act and support Labor to support these workers.

Flynn Electorate: Bruce Highway

Mr O'DOWD (Flynn) (13:59): The Bruce Highway is one of the nation's most important pieces of transport infrastructure, running between Brisbane and Cairns. It spans 1,652 kilometres, over 1,000 miles, including 277 kilometres through the electorate of Flynn. It is part of the national highway and part of the network of highway No. 1.

I am passionate about our roads in Flynn and also celebrate when we have some more funding to improve our situation. Work is about to begin on the Bruce Highway between Bajool and Marmor. Some \$32 million will be spent on new turning lanes at Bajool at the South Ulam Road intersection, on widening centre lines and on extensive resurfacing. Five thousand vehicles go between Rockhampton and Gladstone on a daily basis. These improvements will make a huge difference to the safety and driving enjoyment of the people of Central Queensland.

The SPEAKER: In accordance with standing order 43, the time for members' statements has concluded.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (14:00): Before we go to questions without notice, at the outset of question time, I just want to inform the House that the Rt Hon. David Carter, Speaker of the House of Representatives of the parliament of New Zealand, is here on the floor. It is great to see you here. I had the pleasure of visiting you in New Zealand last year. He is here with Mr David Wilson, the Clerk of the House of Representatives, and of course His Excellency Mr Chris Seed, the High Commissioner of New Zealand. On behalf of the House, a very, very warm welcome. I might look to you for inspiration over the next hour and 10 minutes!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Workplace Relations

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:01): My question is to the Prime Minister. Last Thursday, the Fair Work Commission made a decision to cut the take-home pay of nearly 700,000 Australians. What is the Prime Minister going to do to stop this pay cut?

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Members on my right will cease interjecting.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:01): The decision last Thursday could not have come as a surprise to the Leader of the Opposition, because he was single-

handedly responsible for the Fair Work Commission considering the whole issue of penalty rates. It was his decision to ask Fair Work to deal with it, and he made that decision. He made that decision, and he appointed the commissioners. So it was entirely the work of the Leader of the Opposition.

We know, of course, that when he was asked by Neil Mitchell in April last year whether he would accept and support the decision of the independent umpire, he said: 'I will. I'll accept it.' Mitchell said:

Even if they reduce Sunday Penalty rates?

Mr Shorten said:

Well, I said I'd accept the independent tribunal and that makes a big difference between us ... and the Liberals.

What we see here is an issue that underlines the lack of integrity, the lack of consistency and the pure hypocrisy of the Leader of the Opposition.

What about this, from 2012? It is a wonderful video. It is *Meet the Press*:

I think the best way—

said the Leader of the Opposition—

to protect Fair Work Australia is to protect its independence. It's a statutory body, it's doing its investigations and the argument which says that the Government needs to intervene would undermine its independence. It's an independent body.

Well, that is a bold statement—hard to connect to the remarks we just heard. It gets even—

Honourable members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister will resume his seat. Just before I call the Leader of the Opposition: members on both sides will cease interjecting. The Leader of the House, the Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment and the Minister for the Environment and Energy—again, regrettably. The level of interjections is too high on both sides. We have only been away a week. Everyone has very good memories. I am not going to keep repeating what I said in the last sitting week.

The Leader of the Opposition on a point of order?

Mr Shorten: On relevance—the Prime Minister should stop worrying about me. Will he stop a pay cut to 700,000 ordinary Australians?

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the Opposition will resume his seat. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr TURNBULL: Not only was the Leader of the Opposition responsible for Fair Work conducting this inquiry—

Mr Dreyfus interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Isaacs is warned!

Mr TURNBULL: but in 2013, together with Prime Minister Kevin Rudd and Treasurer Chris Bowen, the Leader of the Opposition, then the minister for education and workplace relations reform, promised that a Rudd Labor government would provide funding of \$400,000 over two years to COSBOA—that is, the small-business organisation—to:

... participate in the 4 year review of Modern Awards due to start next year.

This ensures that small business has appropriate representation in those proceedings.

What did they imagine the small-business organisation would be saying? Did they think COSBOA would be saying, 'Those penalty rates are too low; they've got to go up'? Did they think they would say they should stay the same? Of course not.

He started the review. He appointed the commissioners. He defended its independence. And then he was going to pay the small-business lobby to argue for the reduction of Sunday penalty rates. Well, he would know a lot about that from one EBA to another. He did it to the members of the AWU again and again.

Australia-Indonesia Relationship

Australia-Israel Relationship

Mr MORTON (Tangney) (14:05): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on how recent visits from world leaders have strengthened Australia's relationship with Indonesia and Israel? How did these visits help deliver more opportunities for Australian businesses and enhance security for all Australians?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:05): I thank the honourable member for his question. Yes, in the last week we have had visits from the Prime Minister of Israel and the President of Indonesia, and they underlined our strong relations with both countries. At the moment, we see people in Australia and indeed elsewhere in the world wanting to go down into that dark alley, that dead end, of protectionism, which we know will cost jobs and opportunities for Australians.

I am proud to say that we were able in the discussions with President Widodo to secure a continued commitment to open markets and more access for Australian exporters in Indonesia, a commitment to conclude the Indonesia-Australia Comprehensive Economic Partnership, a free trade deal, by the end of this year and, in an immediate outcome, to reduce tariffs on the export of Australian sugar to Indonesia to the ASEAN standard of five per cent. This will create more opportunities, more markets, for Australian cane growers and of course access to great, high-quality Australian sugar for Indonesian industry.

In addition to that, we have reached agreement with the President of Indonesia to increase the weight, increase the length of export permits and increase the age range of Australian cattle to be able to be exported to Indonesia. Again, what that does is create more opportunities and more jobs for the cattle industry in Australia. It is, yet again, another step in the direction of more markets. We are such a great exporting nation. So many of Australians' jobs depend on exports. On our side, we are committed to more trade and more open markets. Those opposite may sing the siren song of protectionism; it is a dead-end. That is the way to poverty. We need open markets, more trade and more jobs. On the security side, we agreed with the President of Indonesia to the full resumption of defence cooperation. It is of vital importance, as we enhance our maritime cooperation and as we work together with Indonesia, to make the region safe and to fight against terrorism.

In terms of the visit from Prime Minister Netanyahu, we again focused on counterterrorism and we focused on our cooperation, on security and also on the enormous economic opportunities for more collaboration between Australia and Israel, especially in the field of innovation and technology. We have a long and strong history together between Australia and

Israel and it is acquiring a massive innovative technological dimension, which we will exploit as we work together to create jobs and the opportunities of the 21st century.

Workplace Relations

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton) (14:09): My question is to the Prime Minister. Why is the Prime Minister standing by and doing absolutely nothing to stop nearly 700,000 Australians from having their pay cut by up to \$77 a week?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:09): There was a time when the honourable member's leader—and I suspect the honourable member himself—supported the independent umpire, the Fair Work Commission. The Leader of the Opposition has been so eloquent that it would take days to go through his defence of the Fair Work Commission. To Leon Byner, 17 May last year, he said:

The best defence workers have is a strong independent umpire.

That is not bad! In Brisbane, on 1 June last year:

I've got full confidence in the independent umpire maintaining our penalty rates structure. Penalty rates were first introduced in Australia through the application of unions representing workers and arbitrated by the independent umpire. And the improvements ... have always come through the independent umpire.

On the same day, on the idea that if you took away the independent umpire then somehow miraculously you trusted parliament to set the conditions in every Australian workplace, he said:

... that will be providing a loaded gun for a future Conservative government to radically reduce conditions in Australia.

Well, you have the current conservative government—

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister will resume his seat. The Manager of Opposition Business on a point of order.

Mr Burke: It is on direct relevance, Mr Speaker. The question asked the Prime Minister what he is doing. If the answer is 'nothing', he should sit down.

Government members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the House will cease interjecting, as will the Foreign Minister. The Prime Minister is completely in order. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr TURNBULL: In terms of dealing with penalty rates, from our side of politics we believe that the Fair Work Commission is the independent umpire, it should make the decisions and we should respect them. That used to be the position of the other side. Apparently in January, according to the member for McMahon, the Leader of the Opposition had some sort of thought cleansing experience. Suddenly, he was reprogrammed—

Mr Pyne: It is called the CFMEU!

Mr TURNBULL: Yes, I think it was the CFMEU! I thank my friend for the inspiration there. That is undoubtedly what it was. But, of course, there is enormous experience on the other side of the House with trading away penalty rates. In fact, they are dab hands at it. We have talked about Cleanevent and its 2006 EBA, which was with the AWU, that specifically excluded penalty rates, public holiday pay, overtime and shift loading. It was saving Cleanevent \$2 million a year in wages by 2010. That was a pretty good deal for the company.

It entered into a 1998 EBA with the AWU, which saved the company up to \$400 million to 2004, after removing night-shift penalties and weekend loadings. So the Leader of the Opposition has a lot of experience trading away penalty rates there. It is a long list—Chiquita Mushrooms, Cirque du Soleil. The Leader of the Opposition is an absolute expert in trading away penalty rates. He used to be an authority on respecting the independent umpire, but now I am afraid that he has been reprogrammed.

Opposition members interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Barton is warned. The member for Gorton can just wait for a second while I deal with a few members of the House, if that is okay. You can stand and wait or resume your seat—whatever you like. The member for Bendigo interjects consistently. If someone were to transcribe the member for Bendigo's interjections through that answer, it will come to about half the total of the Prime Minister's words. The member for Bendigo will not interject for the rest of question time. The member for Bendigo will not interject now. She is warned, as is the member for Griffith once again. The member for Gorton, seeking leave?

Mr Brendan O'Connor: I am seeking leave to table an article from the *Sydney Morning Herald* that indicates that up to \$77 will be cut for each worker for 65,000 workers.

The SPEAKER: Is leave granted?

Leave not granted.

Energy

Mr IRONS (Swan) (14:13): My question is to the Prime Minister. Will the Prime Minister update the House on what the government is doing to ensure that energy is affordable and reliable for Australian businesses and households, including in my electorate of Swan?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:14): I thank the honourable member for his question. He knows very well that Australian businesses are under pressure with rising costs, just as Australian families are. No costs are rising faster than energy costs and electricity costs in particular. We can best support Australian families and Australian businesses—like those I visited this morning in Hume, not far from here—by ensuring that they have affordable and reliable electricity. The greatest threat to that affordable and reliable electricity is the reckless policies of the Australian Labor Party. And they are not just a theoretical threat; we have seen exactly what happens in South Australia. We have seen there an enormous renewable energy target with no planning to integrate that renewable energy into the grid, no consideration given to transmission or storage, no consideration given to baseload power other than shutting it down, and the result has been the most expensive and the least reliable energy in Australia.

These costs of electricity have been skyrocketing. A car mechanic in Ipswich has seen their power bill double from \$5,000 a year to \$10,000. A hairdresser in Western Sydney has seen her power bill go from \$2,200 to \$4,800. The businesses I met with today in Hume with the Minister for the Environment and Energy and Senator Seselja included a bottle maker, Bottles of Australia, who said energy is around nine per cent of the cost of running their business. They are an exporter. They are dealing at the competitive margin, dealing in cents of advantage per bottle. Doubling their electricity cost over the last decade, with 20 per cent rises foreshadowed in the ACT, undermines their competitiveness.

One of the other small businesses there said that the cost in electricity that was foreshadowed was going to result in him having to lay off workers. We saw another business there that operates a data centre. Energy cost for them is 20 per cent of their overhead. They are in a competitive business both within Australia and internationally. How do they continue to compete if energy costs keep on rising and rising? Labor has no plan for this other than an ideological commitment to renewable energy without any plan for integration.

We are taking an all-of-the-above approach, a rational approach—businesslike, based on engineering and economics. We are committed to storage, transmission, affordable and reliable power. *(Time expired)*

Workplace Relations

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:17): My question is to the Prime Minister. In April of last year the Prime Minister legislated to overturn the decision of the Road Safety Remuneration Tribunal, the independent umpire for safe rates in the trucking industry, and then in October of last year the Prime Minister again legislated to pre-empt a decision of the Fair Work Commission in relation to the Country Fire Authority, so why is the Prime Minister now refusing to legislate to stop this pay cut to 700,000 Australians?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:17): April was a notable month last year because that was the month in which the Leader of the Opposition gave his absolutely unqualified, unequivocal pledge to Neil Mitchell that he would support, commit to, abide by the decision of the Fair Work Commission on penalty rates. He was given every opportunity to find some wriggle room. He was given every opportunity to change his mind. But he committed to it. That is the point.

He knows as well as every other member here, every other former union organiser on their side of the House, every former small business owner in this House—everybody knows that there is a trade-off between high penalty rates on weekends and ordinary rates and conditions during the rest of the week, and there is also the question of how many jobs are going to be available. You have Iain Ross, the President of the Fair Work Commission, a lifelong official of the Australian Congress of Trade Unions, one of the most highly respected trade union officials, put on there by the Labor Party, who justified the reduction in Sunday penalty rates how? Because, he said, it will make more jobs available on weekends and that means there will be more jobs available on weekends particularly for younger people. It will mean business owners will not have to operate their business themselves. They will be able to take people on. There will be more jobs and more hours. The Retail Traders Association estimates another 40,000 jobs would be available. So that was the decision.

It is obviously a long and complex examination: thousands of pages of evidence, hundreds of witnesses. COSBOA would have been funded by the Labor Party if they had had the chance, but they did not win the 2013 election. All of that evidence was considered by the independent tribunal. Just as Jennie George, former President of the ACTU, said in her letter to *The Australian* last week, the Leader of the Opposition was right to support the independence of the umpire during the election. He was right to commit to supporting it, but he is wrong now. He should be careful what he wishes for, because the foundation of the industrial relations system in Australia has been an independent umpire. The Labor Party has fought for that for years, they have defended it for years and now it has suited their purposes to throw it aside.

In conclusion, as far as the RSRT is concerned, its abolition was always our policy, and we carried it out. (*Time expired*)

Workplace Relations

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (14:21): My question is for the Prime Minister. Prime Minister, Newspoll today should be no surprise. Young people are getting screwed over. Owning a home is out of reach, study is getting more expensive, work is getting more insecure and now many young people's wages will be cut after the Fair Work Commission decision, cheered on by your government, to cut their penalty rates. Last year the Greens announced our plan to protect penalty rates in legislation, and we are pleased that others are now on board. Prime Minister, will you now join with the rest of the parliament in protecting the wages of hundreds of thousands of Australians, especially our youngest and lowest paid workers, by backing the Greens bill? Wouldn't it be better to spend this week protecting young people's wages instead of giving the big banks a multi-billion-dollar handout?

The SPEAKER: Before I call the Prime Minister: I am going to allow the question but caution the member for Melbourne about the use of language in his question being unparliamentary or certainly unsavoury. I have cautioned him on that before. If there is a repeat of it, I will simply sit the member for Melbourne down. This is made more difficult by the change to the standing orders of course, which gives 45 seconds for long speeches rather than 30, but that is beyond my control. But I do say to the member for Melbourne that, if there is a repeat of that, I will simply sit him down and move to the next question. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:22): I can understand the member for Melbourne's unhappiness that the plagiarism of the Greens policy by the Labor Party has not been acknowledged. It is yet another example of the green tail wagging the Labor dog.

I have addressed this issue in my previous answers, but I will take the opportunity to quote the observation of president Iain Ross. This is the former Australian Council of Trade Unions official, appointed to head Fair Work by the Labor Party, as were the other four members of the panel. This is what he said:

The evidence also supports the proposition that a lower Sunday penalty rate would increase service levels with a consequent increase in employment (in terms of hours worked by existing employees or the engagement of new employees).

In particular, a reduction in Sunday penalty rates is likely to lead to: more stores being open on Sundays, increased Sunday trading hours, a reduction in hours by some owner operators, an increase in overall hours worked in retail stores'.

That is the conclusion after, as I said earlier, several years, thousands of pages of evidence and hundreds of witnesses before the independent tribunal. They were tasked with this job by the former Labor government. They had all of the evidence from employers and employees. They considered it very carefully. Honourable members would understand, and I am sure the member for Melbourne would understand, that there was always a balance between the rate of penalty rates and its impact on employment. It is clearly a contentious matter. An independent body has determined it. It has considered it carefully. It has come to the conclusion.

The Labor Party previously said we must respect the independent umpire, and they suggested we would not. Well, we do and we have. It is the Labor Party that has changed. We

respect the independent umpire's decision. They have made the decision, and honourable members opposite—and indeed the honourable member for Melbourne—should bear in mind what Jenny George said, 'Be careful what you wish for'. Be careful what you wish for when you decide that independent tribunals' judgements are only to be respected when they suit your own preconceived views.

DISTINGUISHED VISITORS

The SPEAKER (14:25): Before I call the member for Durack, I would like to inform the House that we have present in the gallery this afternoon a parliamentary delegation from Lao. On behalf of the House I extend a very warm welcome to all of you here.

Honourable members: Hear, hear!

QUESTIONS WITHOUT NOTICE

Economy

Ms PRICE (Durack) (14:25): My question is to the Treasurer. Will the Treasurer update the House on action the government is taking to reduce the cost-of-living pressures for hardworking Australians? How are government policies giving Australian families the opportunities they need to get ahead?

Mr MORRISON (Cook—Treasurer) (14:25): I thank the member for Durack for her question. I thank all members on this side of the House for their concern and their acknowledgment of the very real challenges that Australians are facing as we move from the mining investment boom through to ensuring that Australians can look forward with confidence in the future of our economy. We are in our 26th year of economic growth. That has not occurred by accident. It has occurred as a result of the hard work of Australians, of businesses, of employees and of others who have delivered a generation of prosperity that this country has never known before. The way you continue to ensure that prosperity remains in place is by doing a number of things, which this government is doing.

The first of those is to ensure that we continue to attract the investment into business, into enterprises and into products that provide the jobs and provide the wages that Australians can rely on in the future. So our enterprise tax plan, our infrastructure plan—just alone on reducing the compliance costs for business, as the Minister for Small Business will know, we have reduced the compliance cost for business, in particular small business, in this country by \$5.8 billion every year ongoing. These are the sorts of initiatives that ensure that we are able to drive business growth which supports jobs.

On top of that, it is this government that ensured in this year's budget that we have put 500,000 Australians in the place where they do not go into the second-highest tax bracket. It is this government which has reduced personal income taxes for Australians who were earning ordinary average real-time earnings, and we have ensured that they have not gone into the second-highest tax bracket. It is this side of the House that has been seeking to ensure affordable child care for Australian families now for years. The only ones who have stood in the way of that are those who sit opposite, the Labor Party. Those in the Labor Party do not understand that, if you want to invest in new services, you have to be able to pay for them. This side of the House understands that. They have stood in the way of more-affordable child care now for several years. Now they have the opportunity to turn that around in these last few sitting weeks before the budget, and I would encourage them to do that. I know

Australian families would like them to do that, and they would be encouraging them to do exactly that.

But it is not just that; it is the cost of energy as well—as the Prime Minister, I think, has rightly pointed out. Households are facing higher energy costs because of the mindless pursuit of ideological policies by Labor state governments. Those opposite share those policies. On this side of the House, we embrace all forms of energy—whether it is coal or wind or any of the forms of energy that will deliver more affordable prices for householders and business.
(Time expired)

Mr Bowen interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for McMahon might settle down. The member for Sydney has the call.

Workplace Relations

Ms PLIBERSEK (Sydney—Deputy Leader of the Opposition) (14:29): Thank you, Mr Speaker. My question is to the Prime Minister. How many women will have their pay cut because of the penalty rates decision, and what will this do to the gender pay gap in Australia?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:29): There are over 600,000 workers affected.

Ms Plibersek interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Sydney!

Mr TURNBULL: My information is that the gender balance in the retail trade sector is 55.5 per cent female and 44.5 per cent male, and in the accommodation and food services sector it is 53.4 per cent female and 46.6 per cent male. While the Fair Work Commission said that it did have regard to this, it noted there was a report which suggested that, of the hospitality workers who receive penalty rates, 50.7 per cent are male, compared to 49.3 per cent who are female. I am just quoting from the evidence that was being presented.

Ms Macklin interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Jagajaga!

Mr TURNBULL: I am sure that there is more material in the decision—

Mr Dutton interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The Minister for Immigration and Border Protection is warned.

Mr TURNBULL: but, overall, there are somewhat more females than males working in those sectors, but it is not clear, in terms of those who are receiving penalty rates and will be affected by the decision, that the balance is markedly different between men and women. If I can take the question on notice, I will arrange for the minister to provide further information to the honourable member.

Dairy Industry

Mr DRUM (Murray) (14:31): My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources. Will the minister update the House on the contributions of Australia's dairy sector to the Australian economy? What are the obstacles to the viability of this industry? What are the jobs that it creates for hardworking Australians?

Mr JOYCE (New England—Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources) (14:31): I thank the honourable member for his question and note that dairy farming in Shepparton accounts for 22 per cent of Victoria's dairy production. It is home to 1,040 of Victoria's 4,711 dairy farms. Australia's dairy industry is a \$13 billion manufacturing and export industry, and over 6,000 Australian dairy farmers produce close to 10 billion litres of milk each year. It is good to note that, after the dairy crisis and after working with the industry, prices are now starting to rise again. Fonterra's price is over \$5 a kilo for milk solids—

Mr Fitzgibbon interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Hunter is warned!

Mr JOYCE: and it is also noted that the price for Murray Goulburn has risen to \$4.95. So we have had a substantial increase in the dairy price. It is also interesting to note that the Australian Labor Party did absolutely nothing when, under Labor, the price was vastly lower than it was when we called it a crisis.

The direct impact of what we are seeing, though, in Victorian Labor's 40 per cent renewable energy target is that it is driving up the cost for electricity producers. Electricity is such a vital component of dairying production. We see it with the dairy shed and in their refrigeration. Every section has had to deal with it. With some of the producers down there, we have noted VicFeeds operations, a family-owned stockfeed pellet manufacturing mill that supplies dairy farmers in the Goulburn Valley and Gippsland. They are looking at a 151 per cent hike in the cost of their electricity in the next 12 months.

Of course, you cannot just keep putting those costs onto business. If you put those costs onto businesses, the businesses will go out of business. What we now have is the Australian Labor Party mimicking their state colleagues in South Australia, and we know what the result of that is. We do not have to model what happened in South Australia. It is there for everybody to see. It is a complete fiasco. It is creating immense pressures on business. It is driving people out of work. It is driving manufacturing out of the state. And now we have the Australian Labor Party seeming to not really care about labourers anymore. Unless they want to change their policy, this will mean that they are going to stand behind a policy that they will do to the Australian Commonwealth what the Australian Labor Party has done in South Australia.

Now, it is interesting today—and it has been worth noting—that the member for Maribyrnong, the Leader of the Opposition, has no interest in coming to the dispatch box to defend his party's policy. He is very interested in writing on a piece of paper. He is very interested in not looking at the cameras. He likes to look down, but he does not like to look at his own policy. But I think the Australian people want to know what he has to say about his own policy. The Australian people want to know what is going to happen to Australia under his policy, rather than what is happening in his notes. *(Time expired)*

Workplace Relations

Ms O'TOOLE (Herbert) (14:34): My question is to the Deputy Prime Minister. Analysis by PwC, reported in *The Australian*, shows wages in regional Australia have grown three times more slowly than in major cities. Given regional workers are already doing it tough, why is the Deputy Prime Minister supporting pay cuts for regional Australians, including up

to 13,000 retail, accommodation and food services workers in the electorate of Dawson and up to 16,000 in the electorate of Leichhardt?

Mr Snowden: Why don't you get up and answer?

The SPEAKER: I remind the member for Lingiari he has already been warned. He was warned earlier in the day during the suspension, just in case he has forgotten.

Mr JOYCE (New England—Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Agriculture and Water Resources) (14:35): I thank the honourable member for her question, and I must say it verges on the perverse. Here is the Australian Labor Party, the party that is going to rip the heart out of the dams policy, taking away the money that actually brings about regional jobs and brings about regional growth. The Australian Labor Party has no belief in regional development. The Australian Labor Party did nothing about the construction of the inland rail. The Australian Labor Party stands against decentralisation. In fact, it was the Australian Labor Party that moved for a Senate inquiry to stop the decentralisation of APVMA out of Canberra to a regional area to provide regional jobs. The Australian Labor Party has done nothing for regional work. The Australian Labor Party have their 100 positive policies. They did not have one for the agricultural industry. I see the member for Lingiari looking at me—what is the Australian Labor Party going to do for—

The SPEAKER: The Deputy Prime Minister will resume his seat.

Ms O'Toole interjecting—

The SPEAKER: I have not called the member for Herbert yet. I am just slowing things down a bit. The member for Herbert on a point of order.

Ms O'Toole: Whilst I appreciate the Deputy Prime Minister's response—

The SPEAKER: You will state the point of order!

Ms O'Toole: you have not answered one question that I asked.

The SPEAKER: The member for Herbert will resume her seat. That is a frivolous point of order. At no point did she state the point of order. The Deputy Prime Minister has the call.

Mr JOYCE: I note that in the member for Herbert's electorate—we are right next to it—we are trying to get Hell's Gate Dam built. And what has she done to support us on that? What has she done to support the construction of Hell's Gate Dam? The member for Herbert should hang her head in shame because she is letting down the people of Townsville. She has never stood up for Hell's Gate Dam. She has never stood up for the economic growth of Townsville. You have not stood up for it. You are standing in a party that wants to take away the money—

The SPEAKER: The Deputy Prime Minister's time has concluded.

Mr Fitzgibbon: Mr Speaker—

The SPEAKER: The member for Hunter will resume his seat. The call is on this side.

Mr Fitzgibbon: I am seeking leave—

The SPEAKER: You are not doing anything. I have not given you the call. You are hoping. Is the member for Hunter seeking leave?

Mr Fitzgibbon: I am, Mr Speaker.

The SPEAKER: Okay. Proceed.

Mr Fitzgibbon: I am seeking leave to table the Australian Labor Party's agriculture policy, part of the 100 policies the Labor Party took to the last—

The SPEAKER: The member for Hunter will resume his seat. The member for Barker.

Energy

Mr PASIN (Barker) (14:38): Mr Speaker, my question is to the Minister for Health and Minister for Sport. Will the minister outline to the House why energy security is crucial to providing reliable health care for Australian families? Is the minister aware of any examples where an unreliable energy supply has put the delivery of critical healthcare services at risk?

Mr HUNT (Flinders—Minister for Health and Minister for Sport) (14:38): I want to thank the member for Barker, who knows that energy security is fundamental to the provision of safety and patient care in our healthcare services and hospitals. I know myself that I warned on 17 August, when I was in South Australia, of the serious and significant risks to their infrastructure and energy security from the South Australian experiment, which the Leader of the Opposition wants to adopt nationally. We know, however, that this has translated to real and significant consequences for the South Australian healthcare system. On 8 February, during the most recent round of blackouts, what we saw in Millicent, Penola, Murray Bridge and Mount Gambier was that those hospitals were all forced onto backup generators. Quite significantly, the South Australian energy minister at the time tried to say that critical infrastructure such as hospitals would be exempt from load shedding. It was then up to a South Australian government official to correct it and make the small correction that smaller hospitals and healthcare facilities across South Australia may be affected from time to time. Well, they were. And so four significant hospitals and facilities, including the state's largest regional hospital, were forced onto generators.

But generators may not always work in a time of crisis. We saw that on the 28 September blackout. Remember the blackout that was just a 'hiccup', according to the member for Port Adelaide? On that day, the Flinders Medical Centre generator failed. What was the consequence of that failure? Embryos waiting to be transferred to a fertility clinic—

Ms Rishworth interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Kingston!

Mr HUNT: were destroyed as a consequence of that blackout. If there are any members on that side who think that is a hiccup, funny or trivial for those involved, now is your chance to speak up.

Mr Butler interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Port Adelaide!

Mr HUNT: But it was not just Flinders; it was also Port Augusta, where for five hours that day the backup generator failed. So the importance of energy security to health care is absolutely fundamental. It is not just us who think this. As the South Australian HSU—you remember the HSU and your good friend Craig, Leader of the Opposition—itself said:

There is much equipment that runs on power. You have oxygen machines, you have machines that are taking blood pressure automatically, there are breathing apparatus that are run by power.

There could not be a clearer statement from no less than the HSU why energy security in South Australia is so fundamental to health care. They have blown it up at the state level. The

Leader of the Opposition wants to do the same at the federal level. He should protect our hospitals and abandon his reckless plans. *(Time expired)*

Workplace Relations

Ms CATHERINE KING (Ballarat) (14:41): My question is to the Prime Minister. Can the Prime Minister guarantee the decision to cut penalty rates in the retail and hospitality industries will not lead to the pay of Australians working in other industries being cut—people like nurses, who work late nights and weekends caring for the sick and injured? Why won't the Prime Minister support Labor's legislation to protect the penalty rates of all Australians?

Mr Hawke interjecting—

Mr Craig Kelly interjecting—

The SPEAKER: Members on my right, the member for Mitchell and the member for Hughes, will cease interjecting. The Prime Minister has the call.

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:42): The honourable member knows very well that the commission went to great pains to make it very clear that the decision does not affect any awards other than those dealt with in the decision. What the honourable member is promoting—

Ms Catherine King interjecting—

The SPEAKER: The member for Ballarat will not interject.

Mr TURNBULL: is yet another reckless scare campaign to frighten Australians.

Ms Catherine King: What's to stop it?

Mr TURNBULL: The honourable member knows very well that this decision will apply only—

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister will resume his seat for a second. The member for Ballarat has a habit that I have warned her of numerous times of interjecting consistently after she has asked a question. I have called her to order a number of times on that. The level of interjections is too high. I am not going to keep doing it. The member for Ballarat can leave under 94(a).

The member for Ballarat then left the chamber.

The SPEAKER: The Prime Minister has the call. Has the Prime Minister concluded his answer?

Mr TURNBULL: I have.

Energy

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Chief Government Whip) (14:43): My question is to the Minister for Defence Industry. Will the minister explain why it is important to have a stable and secure energy supply if we are to maximise the benefits of defence industry boom occurring in Australia as a result of this government's policies?

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Defence Industry) (14:44): I thank the member for Forrest for her question. I can tell her that the government's approach to defence and defence industry is certainly bearing the fruit that we had hoped for in terms of creating jobs here in Australia but also creating the most lethal and capable defence force in

Australia's history. Members will remember that the Turnbull government announced a \$195 billion build-up of our defence capability over the next 0 years. That will not only give us the most capable and lethal defence force in Australia's history, but we are also committed to using the heft of that almost \$200 billion investment to grow high-tech advanced manufacturing, high-value jobs here in the Australian manufacturing sector.

It is certainly bearing fruit. Northrop Grumman, for example, have announced a doubling of their workforce from 500 to 1,000 workers in Australia. DCNS, the submarine designer and builder, has already opened its office, employing 50 people in the last two months. That will grow to 2,900 people by the early 2020s. BAE is taking on 200 extra engineers over the next couple of years and 100 extra support staff. That is even before the announcements of significant tenders over the next 12 months, which BAE may well win or not win, which may require them to expand their defence force even further. The ASC, the Australian Submarine Corporation, has doubled its graduate intake in anticipation of the increased work that will be flowing because of the government's continuous naval ship build. This is on the back of six years of absolute inaction by the Labor Party when they were in office, in comparison to the 54 vessels that we have committed to in the short period of the coalition government.

The second part of that question asked me about the risks to this massive expansion. The supply of energy and the cost of electricity are a very significant risks in expanding our manufacturing base. We have already seen that the Department of Defence will have to build a \$20 million diesel power generator at Osborne to look after the shipyard and the submarine yard—\$20 million of taxpayers' money because the state government cannot keep the power on in South Australia. So we are already seeing the outcome of Labor's ideological approach rather than our all-of-the-above approach. Recently, Paul O'Malley from BlueScope Steel and Andrew Mackenzie from BHP Billiton both specifically warned that the expansion of steel production and the expansion of Olympic Dam are at risk because of a failure to provide stable and cheap power. This is a result of Labor's ideological obsession with renewable energy. *(Time expired)*

Workplace Relations

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (14:47): My question is to the Prime Minister. Why is this government giving big business a tax cut but doing nothing to stop workers getting a pay cut?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:47): The honourable member must be surprised to find himself asking questions like this, given that my answers invariably involve quoting him! The case for company tax cuts was made very eloquently by the Leader of the Opposition in this place only a few years ago, when he said, 'Everybody knows that cutting company tax increases investment, productivity, employment and jobs.' He made the case. He said, 'Everybody knows that's good Labor policy.' The member for McMahon was so enamoured of cutting company tax he wrote a book about it. Their hero, Paul Keating, was, of course, a master at it too. The Labor Party have not advanced one position in this question time today that is not 180 degrees of the position they took a year or so ago.

Turning to penalty rates, we have heard again and again from the Leader of the Opposition how important it is to defend the independent umpire. He has waxed eloquently about the independent umpire for years and years—on television, in doorstops and on radio. It is mother's milk to him. He defended the independence of the independent umpire against the

Liberal Party and the National Party. We were on a unity ticket with him then. We agreed that we should respect the decisions of the independent umpire. But now he wants to abandon it, just like he wants to abandon his views on trade. He used to be a free trader; he is now a protectionist. He used to believe in cutting company tax; now he wants to increase it. He used to believe that the decisions of the independent umpire, the Fair Work Commission, should be respected; now he wants to abandon it.

We have seen a complete backflip by this Leader of the Opposition. On the Fair Work Commission, I will take the opportunity to add to my answer to a question from the member for Sydney. The Fair Work Commission—the honourable member can study the decision herself, of course—concluded that:

There is no evidence before us which shows the number of retail workers who usually work on Sundays, by gender.

That was their decision. Their conclusion as far as hospitality workers was, as I indicated earlier, that there were somewhat more male workers receiving penalty rates than female workers. But the conclusion that they made was that their decision was entirely in conformity with the modern award objective of ensuring equal remuneration—(*Time expired*)

Energy

Mr CREWTER (Dunkley) (14:50): My question is for the Minister for the Environment and Energy. Will the minister update the House on the government's actions to ensure an affordable supply of energy for hardworking families and small businesses, including in Dunkley? What hurdles stand in the way to achieving this security?

Mr FRYDENBERG (Kooyong—Minister for the Environment and Energy) (14:50): I thank the member for Dunkley for his question and acknowledge that, with 16,000 small businesses in his electorate—whether it is the butcher in Frankston, whether it is the baker in Seaford or, indeed, whether it is the candlestick maker in Mornington—they are all paying higher prices for their electricity. We, the Turnbull government, are committed to driving down the costs of power by reining in the networks by changes to limited merits review, by changing the gas transportation system and pricing arrangements, and by putting in place a realistic and practicable Renewable Energy Target.

I am asked about any hurdles. We know that last week the Leader of the Opposition doubled down when it came to his reckless 50 per cent Renewable Energy Target. He does not know how much it costs, he does not know what it is called and he does not know how it is going to work. This is what the member for Sydney said on 14 February, 'It's a 50 per cent ambition.' This is what the member for Watson said on 16 February, 'It's generally referred to as a goal.' This is what the member for McMahon said on 16 February, 'We have all been very clear and explicit about a policy objective.' This is what the member for Hunter said on Sky:

It's not a policy. It's an announcement of an aspiration.

You have to have goals in life!

We know that the Leader of the Opposition went on 7.30 and said:

... if you don't know where you're going, any road will get you there.

That is what he famously said. But this has to take the cake. In his speech to Bloomberg last week on the 50 per cent renewable energy target he said:

... this is our target, it is our goal, it is our objective, it's our aspiration.

He then went on to say:

It's not something that we will need to legislate, because we are confident Australia will achieve it.

I thought, 'That's strange. What did he say to the Australian people less than a year ago at the election? What did he say to 24 million people?' I discovered on page 15 of the Labor Party election document it said: 'A Labor government will ensure the implementation of these reforms through Commonwealth law and legislation relating to the 2030 target of 50 per cent renewable energy generation.' So there you go. He has contradicted his own policy document from less than a year ago. He has contradicted the member for McMahon, the member for Sydney and the member for Watson and he is giving up on 16,000 small businesses in the electorate of Dunkley and many others because he is putting his ideology ahead of the practical reality. (*Time expired*)

Workplace Relations

Mr KEOGH (Burt) (14:54): My question is to the Prime Minister. The Premier of Western Australia has said:

What I would like to see is reduce those excessive Sunday penalty rates.

Does the Prime Minister support the Premier's statement? Doesn't the Prime Minister's refusal to take action show that cutting penalty rates is now his government's policy?

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (14:54): I assume the honourable member would take the view that if the government did not move to legislate to fix interest rates following a Reserve Bank decision that meant that we agreed with the Reserve Bank's decision on monetary policy. The honourable member's attempt to make some facile point about the Fair Work Commission does not do either him or this House justice. He knows very well that this is a complex issue—the determination of the conditions of modern awards and the review of modern awards. It was a government of his party, a Labor government, that gave that task to the Fair Work Commission. It was worked through assiduously and carefully. Arguments were made by unions and by employers. Thousands of pages of evidence were considered. A decision was arrived at which we respect.

The honourable member is a member of the party that claimed to support the independent umpire in determining wages and conditions but now wants to throw it over in a manner that his leader said would be extraordinarily dangerous to do only last year. There has been a complete and utter backflip undertaken by the Labor Party on this. This is rank populism. They have failed to take into account a longstanding tradition and commitment of the Labor Party of supporting the independent umpire. We support the independent umpire and so should honourable members opposite.

Energy

Ms FLINT (Boothby) (14:56): My question is to the Minister for Small Business. Will the minister update the House on the importance of reliable and affordable energy and how this creates the environment small businesses need to get ahead? What barriers are creating uncertainty and threatening job creation for hardworking Australian businesses and families?

Mr McCORMACK (Riverina—Minister for Small Business) (14:56): I thank the member for Boothby for her question. This is a vital issue for small business throughout

South Australia. I know this is an issue about which the member for Boothby and all South Australian MPs on this side of the House are very concerned. I travelled to South Australia last week with the member for Boothby and visited several businesses in her electorate—9,285 small businesses in Adelaide and throughout South Australia. For them the issue of power costs and reliability is not ideological. It is not a hiccup, as the member for Port Adelaide would have you believe. These are real people with real stories. Small business, not that those opposite seem to care or understand, employs people—good people. It creates jobs and opportunities for Australia. It makes and sells goods and services that our community needs and wants. All it needs is power—affordable, reliable, secure and available power.

The member and I met Ben and Marika Poland from Fifty3 Espresso in a local shopping centre. They want to invest. They want to grow. They own a newsagent and a coffee shop and they want to have a go, but the blackouts and the inconsistent supply of power are a handbrake. Ben said: 'You cannot come to work not knowing if you will have power. This is a First World country.' That is quite right. Ben and Marika are not alone either. I met a financial planner in Adelaide—Mark Draper from GEM Capital. He has a small business in the financial planning sector just down the road from the member for Adelaide. He now relies on a diesel backup generator to keep the lights on and the work flowing. Would you believe it? A financial planner is having to rely on a diesel backup generator.

This sorry story for small businesses does not stop in the suburbs of Adelaide. I also went to Murray Bridge with the member for Barker last week. We visited the Farm Fresh Market greengrocer on Adelaide Road and met Carlo and Tracey De Michele. They sell fresh fruit and vegetables in the Murray lands as well as bread, condiments, flour, cheese and dips. The member for Maribyrnong knows all about dips because his personal approval rating has had a number of dips lately! This is a family business, dedicated and hard working, with local staff and attention to detail for food orders. They have served the community well for more than 15 years. But skyrocketing power prices have put Farm Fresh on the back foot, and that is only when the power works. There have been eight blackouts in recent memory and intermittent power has left Farm Fresh in the dark, counting the cost of Labor's ideological approach to energy. It is just like thousands of small businesses across South Australia. Tracey told the member for Barker and I how everything, from the fridges to the freezers, the EFTPOS machines and email, goes down when the power goes off. Now, they have had to dump thousands of dollars of stock. You might laugh, but that is a big hit to their bottom line. Is that the future we want? I would argue: no. All the member for Maribyrnong wants to do is take us back to the Dark Ages. *(Time expired)*

Housing Affordability

Workplace Relations

Mr BRENDAN O'CONNOR (Gorton) (15:00): My question is to the Prime Minister. Given that the Assistant Minister to the Treasurer has said that young Australians should get a high-paying job to buy their first home, why is the government now standing by and doing nothing while the wages of young Australians are being cut?

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Defence Industry) (15:00): Exactly, Mr Speaker. Not content with his first crime against the truth, the Leader of the Opposition is now attempting another crime against the truth. They say that, of course, the first crime is always the hardest, and after that it gets a lot easier. In the election campaign, we

saw the ludicrous 'Mediscare' campaign—his crime against the truth, frightening old ladies by having CFMEU thugs ringing them about 9.30 at night and telling them lies about what we were going to do or not do to Medicare.

Now, we are seeing the Leader of the Opposition in an act of extreme audacity. We have to admire his capacity for audaciousness because this is the man who, when he had the opportunity as secretary of the AWU, routinely traded away the penalty rates of the people that he represented in the most low-paid jobs in Australia, like cleaners, like people who worked for Chiquita Mushrooms, like people who worked in the circus. He did not just do this once or twice. It became a very routine habit. For the Clean Event workers, he did it twice. In 1998 and 2006 he signed EBAs that traded away their penalty rates. With Chiquita Mushrooms, he did it in 2001 and 2004—trading away their penalty rates.

The SPEAKER: The Leader of the House will resume his seat for a second. The Manager of Opposition Business, on a point of order.

Mr Burke: On direct relevance: we are now halfway through the answer and the minister is yet to refer to government policy and why they are not taking any action.

The SPEAKER: I thank the Manager of Opposition Business. It is fair to say that the minister is very close to the line. He might even be leaning over the line. The question had two aspects to it. It had housing affordability and pay cuts, referring to penalty rates. So he is in order—just.

Mr PYNE: Of course, I am in order because, Mr Speaker, the question was about cuts to wages and penalty rates. What I am pointing out is that this Leader of the Opposition has form when it comes to ripping away the penalty rates of workers. I am not reflecting on you, Mr Speaker; I could not agree with you more. I am in order and I remain in order. With the Cirque du Soleil, he did it in 2001. With the Melbourne & Olympic Parks Trust, he traded away the penalty rates of workers in 2001 and 2003. And there was Cut & Fill engineering in 2003 and 2005. On nine separate occasions as secretary of the AWU he signed away the penalty rates of workers. Worse than that: he did it in the case of Clean Event while— (*Time expired*)

Mr Brendan O'Connor: Mr Speaker, I seek leave to table an article where the Assistant Treasurer says that you need to get a highly paid job to buy home. It is an article from *The Australian*.

The SPEAKER: Leave not granted. The member for Gorton does not have leave. I am being lenient on this to keep things moving. I have made it clear before that where documents are freely and publicly available I am not inclined to even ask for leave. Certainly, that applies to parliamentary papers and to *Hansard*. I think it applies to newspaper articles, which do not really need to be tabled for people to access them.

Migration

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde—Government Whip) (15:04): My question is to the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection. Will the minister update the House on how the government is maximising job opportunities for hardworking Australians? Why is it important to ensure that Australia has a well-managed migration program?

Mr DUTTON (Dickson—Minister for Immigration and Border Protection) (15:05): I thank the member for Forde for his question. He is a champion for small businesses. He is a

great local member and he defends small businesses. He wants to create extra jobs for young Australians in his electorate. And he should be commended for it. In fact, every person on this side of the House wants to grow business so that they can employ more young Australians and more Australians into those jobs.

I can report to the House that, in terms of 457 visa holders, the number has fallen by around 13,000 since this government came to office in September 2013. We have put into action our words. We have said that we want to put Australians first and that we want to put Australians into jobs. That is the policy of this government. If you look at the words and actions of this Leader of the Opposition, it is very hard to reconcile the two. He says one thing to the Australian public and he does the complete opposite. He does the complete opposite because he is a well-known fraud not only in this place but across workplaces across the country.

The SPEAKER: The minister will withdraw.

Mr DUTTON: I withdraw, Mr Speaker. The point about this Leader of the Opposition is: you cannot look at his words; you need to have a look at his actions. What happened was, when he was the employment minister in the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd years, the 457 visas ballooned during his period of leadership. You need to look at what he is saying in this question time and in the public at the moment in relation to penalty rates. It is interesting to note that in relation to the Clean Event circumstance, where he was in the AWU at the time, he presided over an arrangement where casual cleaning workers were paid \$18.14 an hour when under the award—

The SPEAKER: The minister will resume his seat. The Manager of Opposition Business, on a point of order.

Mr Burke: Mr Speaker, on direct relevance, the Minister for Immigration has now gone completely off the question. He is responding to a note the Deputy Prime Minister just handed him that has nothing to do with what has been asked.

The SPEAKER: I will keep listening to the minister. I think the minister is in order, but I will listen carefully for the remaining minute. Members on my left do not help by interjecting when the Manager of Opposition Business has made a point of order on their behalf and I am seeking to address the matter.

Mr DUTTON: I was asked about job opportunities for hardworking Australians. The reality is that when this Leader of the Opposition was a union boss pretending to protect workers, he did the complete opposite: he presided over an arrangement in relation to Cleanevent where those workers were entitled to \$50.17 per hour under the award. The deal that he brokered as the union leader, pretending to represent the interests of those workers, ended in those workers being paid \$18.14 an hour. This man is the great false pretender of Australian politics. The Australian public is seeing through him. They have seen that in relation to 457 visas. Where he pretends to be the friend of workers, he is the complete opposite. He has been involved in deal after deal after deal where workers have come off second best. It is a case in relation to 457 visas, and certainly it was the case when he was a trade union leader.

STATEMENTS ON INDULGENCE

Essendon Air Crash

Mr TURNBULL (Wentworth—Prime Minister) (15:08): I wish to offer the condolences of the parliament to the loved ones of those killed in Victoria's worst civil aviation accident in 30 years. On Tuesday 21 February, just after nine o'clock in the morning, a Beechcraft Super King aircraft crashed shortly after take-off from Essendon Airport. The plane had been chartered by four visitors from the United States and was flown by Max Quartermain, an Australian pilot with over 38 years of flying experience. It was a once-in-a-lifetime trip cut tragically short. Nobody on board survived the impact.

We thank the first responders, who once again selflessly and heroically rushed to the scene. To them we offer our deepest gratitude and respect. Again and again Australians show their finer selves in their first response to these terrible accidents.

The authorities will continue their investigation into the circumstances of the accident. Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends of those who died, both here in Australia and in the United States. On behalf of the parliament and all Australians we offer our sincere sympathies.

Mr SHORTEN (Maribyrnong—Leader of the Opposition) (15:10): I thank the Prime Minister for his words. My electorate borders three parts of the Essendon Airport to the west, south and east. We got the news from social media, the way that bad news seems to get out pretty quickly. We saw the pictures of the plume of smoke—very dense, oily and black. Of course, as the Prime Minister has said, it was the death of four American tourists—golfers going to King Island. Their families had to be informed at the Hyatt Hotel by the police just as the news was still breaking. The pilot, Max Quartermain, was very experienced. This is a terrible tragedy. I know where the plane crashed—it is where we shop. It is where my family goes sometimes—the Essendon DFO, which I am sure other members would know.

The area has had plane crashes in the past. A family was killed in Matthews Avenue. There has been another near miss. The Australian Transport Safety Bureau is going to investigate. I thank both my shadow minister and the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport for keeping us informed. The coroner is going to investigate. It was a catastrophic failure. The plane got up to about 200 feet; a mayday was issued and it banked left. We will find out as best we can what happened from the experts.

Plane crashes are very uncommon, but when they happen they have an impact on communities which is much more, perhaps, than other tragedies, because we fly and we can imagine it happening, and we can imagine shopping near airports. I also want to say that on that morning I also thought of the Prime Minister. These things bring back memories. I congratulate the first responders. All Australians express our sympathies to the families and to the family of the pilot as well. If that had happened an hour later that DFO would have been a very crowded place. I do not know if there can be solace taken from that. The first responders were outstanding. I hope that we will find out what happened, but today it is about condolences. May they rest in peace.

Mr Turnbull: I ask that further questions be placed on the *Notice Paper*.

DOCUMENTS

Presentation

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Defence Industry) (15:12): Documents are tabled in accordance with the list circulated to honourable members earlier today. Full details of the documents will be recorded in the *Votes and Proceedings*.

AUDITOR-GENERAL'S REPORTS

Report No. 39 of 2016-2017

The SPEAKER (15:13): I present the Auditor-General's performance audit report No. 39 of 2016-17 entitled *The Australian Border Force's use of statutory powers: Department of Immigration and Border Protection*.

Ordered that the report be made a parliamentary paper.

BUSINESS

Orders of the Day

Mr PYNE (Sturt—Leader of the House and Minister for Defence Industry) (15:13): I declare that the following order of the day, government business, is referred to the Federation Chamber for debate: proposed address-in-reply to the Governor-General's speech: resumption of debate.

Leave of Absence

Mr BURKE (Watson—Manager of Opposition Business) (15:13): I move:

That leave of absence for the remainder of the current period of sittings be given to Mr Hayes on the ground of ill health.

Question agreed to.

The SPEAKER: Can I say briefly that all of our thoughts are with the member for Fowler for as swift a recovery as he can make. I thank the Manager of Opposition Business and the Leader of the House for informing me very early this morning of his accident.

COMMITTEES

Public Accounts and Audit Committee

Report

Mr HILL (Bruce) (15:14): On behalf of the Joint Committee of Public Accounts and Audit, I present the committee's 460th report, entitled *Public sector governance: inquiry based on Auditor-General's report 29 (2015-16)*.

Report made a parliamentary paper in accordance with standing order 39(e).

Mr HILL: by leave—This inquiry was based on the Auditor-General's examination of the government's deregulation agenda. The committee focused on the theme of public sector governance when considering this audit, and was pleased to note that the deregulation agenda was implemented according to many of the practices central to good public governance.

Initiated in late 2013, the deregulation agenda aims to reduce the cost of unnecessary or inefficient regulation on individuals, business and community organisations through whole-of-government coordination of the policy, overseen by the Department of the Prime Minister

and Cabinet. The committee found that the deregulation agenda was implemented according to good public governance principles. The Auditor-General's report concluded that PM&C moved quickly to put in place governance frameworks to support implementation and that audited departments established internal deregulation units with clearly articulated roles, responsibilities and consultative mechanisms.

To support future deregulatory decisions and to emphasise the economic and productivity benefits of the deregulation agenda, the committee report supports the Australian government's December 2013 decision that an economic impact assessment should be undertaken; however, despite the government's commitment to do so, there still has not been an independent verification of the outcomes of deregulation. Such a review would provide a basis for greater confidence for government's claims as to the economic benefits they report. The committee has, therefore, recommended that PM&C report back on progress of implementing this decision.

I would like to extend my thanks to all members of the committee for their consideration of this inquiry and their ongoing efforts to maintain the committee's strong tradition of proper parliamentary scrutiny.

Debate adjourned.

BILLS

Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017

Second Reading

Consideration resumed of the motion:

That this bill be now read a second time.

to which the following amendment was moved:

That all the words after "That" be omitted with a view to substituting the following words:

The House:

(1) declines to give the bill a second reading because it will hurt pensioners, families, new mums and young Australians while holding child care assistance and the National Disability Insurance Scheme to ransom; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

(a) drop their unfair cuts to pensioners, families, new mums and young Australians; and

(b) fix their child care changes so that vulnerable and disadvantaged children are not worse off and Indigenous and country services do not face closure.

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide) (15:16): As I was stating prior to question time, in this legislation the introduction of the new complicated activity test would actually remove the current entitlement of all children in Australia to access two days of early education. And we know that this new activity test would see around 150,000 families effectively worse off. This test effectively slashes subsidised access in half for many of those children, and it removes eligibility completely for some children in families with non-working parents. Well Labor say that we should not punish vulnerable Australian children for the decisions of their parents.

The government's new 12-hour safety net for single income families is not equal to two days care, as the minister claimed. Stakeholders across the sector are calling for an increase in

the available hours so that children can continue to access at least two days care. It is not just Labor; the proposed activity test in this bill and the cut to available subsidised care has been criticised broadly across the early childhood sector. This includes by the Australian Childcare Alliance, Early Childhood Australia, the Early Learning and Care Council of Australia, Early Childhood Management Services, UnitingCare, Mission Australia, Anglicare, United Voice, the Benevolent Society, Early Learning Association Australia and many, many others.

We know that it is a sad reality that child care provides some children with the safest environment they are ever in. Child care can play a really important role in early detection of abusive and neglectful environments. Removing access increases the chances of these children falling through the cracks. We urge the government: fix the flaws in the childcare proposals and Labor will happily work with them to support them through the parliament. We cannot punish the most disadvantaged Australian children.

Mr TED O'BRIEN (Fairfax) (15:19): I am delighted to follow the member for Adelaide, whose speech I followed intensely. It left me aghast, quite frankly. It only takes the Labor Party to complain about a better program that actually costs less money. Maybe their allies, the Greens—dancing from the bottom of the garden—would do likewise, but to actually start complaining, as the member for Adelaide did, that this childcare package costs less than originally anticipated and is therefore a bad thing is absolutely ludicrous.

It does raise a fair question though: why is this package costing less than originally anticipated? The short answer is competence. You see, MYEFO reflected variations to the childcare forward estimates model taking into account our childcare compliance measures. As a result, we enjoy a sizeable downward variation on the childcare fee assistance estimates. That is billions of dollars in terms of the variation due to compliance measures. And yet the member for Adelaide, who is the shadow minister, no less, in this space, complains about it costing less. This is a Labor Party, which bequeathed the coalition an unprecedented deficit and debt problem up to that point, complaining that a package is going to cost less—it is better and it is going to cost less. In other words, they are yet again supporting the notion of building up more debt unnecessarily.

Members will be happy to know that over the past three years the coalition has stopped almost \$1 billion of taxpayer money going to rorters and shonks. Our reforms before parliament here include new compliance measures also, such as the power to pause childcare service application for fee assistance; a new IT system that sees information shared between government agencies, making it a lot easier to transfer information and also to identify where action needs to be taken. In other words, we will be able to address excessive growth within particular childcare service types and where there are concerns about potential rorting.

If you look at the scoreboard, it says it all. Under Labor, in the two years to June 2013, how many cancellations were there in this space? None. How many suspensions maybe? None. How many fines issued? They racked up two. In the 2012-13 year, Labor carried out 523 compliance checks. In the last year, the coalition carried out 3,100 checks—just over 500 versus just over 3,000. Is it any wonder that we are seeing this government demonstrate its competence; therefore, we are seeing a variation through MYEFO for what this package will cost.

I just hope the shadow minister's comments today demonstrated an unconscious incompetence and not a conscious incompetence. Because, indeed, if she was unconsciously

suggesting that families would receive less entitlements then she would be wrong; and if she was doing that purposely, she would be misleading. It is not the case. Let me state this clearly. Families' entitlements to childcare subsidies will not be affected in any way by the estimates variations. For the shadow minister to imply at all that there might be a risk not only sends fear into the very families who she purports to want to help but it also demonstrates again her desire for the children of those families to carry too much debt moving into the future. The core intent of this big omnibus bill is to improve workforce participation, especially by women, and to ensure the long-term sustainability of our entire welfare system based on careful revision of current practice with a keen eye on the need for budget repair, and repair which is fair.

The minister, when he introduced this bill, headlined the childcare measures because the potential positive impact of these measures is truly enormous. They support almost one million Australian families balance their work and parenting responsibilities. That means they are encouraging 230,000 families to take an even greater role in the workforce. That translates into productivity gains, more cash for families to use and of course more opportunities for literally hundreds of thousands of women via a deliberate emphasis on those families where return to work by women is possible, and fairness lies at the heart of these changes. Families on household incomes of \$65,000 or less will receive the highest subsidy rate of 85 per cent. That is up from the current rate of 73 per cent. If a significant portion take up that opportunity to either enter the workforce or increase their hours then there is a range of positive impacts, more than just bigger pay packets for families; it also helps local businesses and helps build the broader economy.

Other measures to boost participation and to reward individual effort include a cap on the hourly rate that can be charged by providers, abolition of rebate caps for most families and an increase in the cap for higher earners from \$7,500 to \$10,000. These are terrific measures and they deserve to be supported by this parliament. But there is a cost, and, in line with the commitment of the coalition on funding new expenditure, this valuable positive effort to bring more women into the workforce or back to the workforce or expand their involvement in the workforce must be funded by savings, not, as members of the opposition might wish, by more taxes or higher debt.

A key element of the proposed savings is a phasing out of the now largely unnecessary end-of-year supplements for the family tax benefit parts A and B. These supplements, from 2004, compensated for an earlier situation where many families for a range of reasons were not able to predict changes to income or circumstances such as return to work and ended up in debt in order to reconcile their household cash flow under the scheme. It is comforting to know that targeted government reforms over the intervening years, including greater accuracy of income reporting, mean the need the end-of-year supplements to act as an offset has been significantly reduced. This proposed saving by the government simply reflects this new reality.

The supplements are a relic and they should go. Not only will that mean the savings they generate can fund the very positive childcare measures, it will also ensure there is room for increased payments to those families who are in the greatest need. Let me explain this by a simple example. Around 1.2 million families in receipt of family tax benefit part A will

receive an extra \$20 for every child up to the age of 19, which is a doubling of the increase that the government previously canvassed, and that will start on 1 July 2018.

There is a range of other measures in this bill that are squarely aimed at budget repair and the need for ongoing, steadfast, determined work on repairing the budget in the face of the strong resistance from those opposite as demonstrated by the member for Adelaide's comments. After beginning 2007 with almost a dream run of no debt, a surplus of \$20 billion and \$45 billion in the bank, Labor's legacy, come 2013, was debt headed to \$667 billion by 2030 at an accumulated back-to-back deficit totalling \$240 billion—the most dramatic deadly turnaround in the nation's finances since Federation built on serial fiscal incompetence and the sort of incompetence we heard from the member for Adelaide only minutes ago. And this fiscal incompetence saw increased year-on-year spending at a rate of 4.5 per cent. The scale of damage to the nation's public finances by the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd era is unprecedented and, unfortunately, it lingers.

Labor points to ongoing expansion of debt and our struggle with the persistent deficit as though they are somehow the fault of the current government. Surprise, surprise! The thing is, though—and this is what the member for Adelaide needs to remind herself and her colleagues—that Labor designed the debt truck. They are the ones who put that truck on the road, hopped in, turned it on and put their foot on the pedal to make it go as fast as it could to rack up more and more debt.

The problem is that, if you put your foot on the pedal, you do not stop and you keep racking up debt, by the time you have a responsible government, like in 2013 with the coalition, taking control of the wheel of the debt truck, you cannot suddenly put on the handbrake. If you do, the truck will turn and it will topple and you will have a hard landing. That is why we continue to bring the debt down by slowing the speed of Labor's debt truck. This bill helps with that very effort.

Now, the Labor Party and maybe some of the loonies in the Greens will remain in denial. Surprisingly, Senator Xenophon is suggesting that, rather than rely on the sorts of measures in this bill to tackle budget repair, we should instead cut defence spending. This is a senator from a state that is going to enjoy enormous benefits from defence spending in the years ahead, yet that is his solution.

Despite these problems, the coalition have managed to get \$22 billion of savings through, and we have \$13 billion more in this parliament. Members opposite and all non-government members in the Senate need to understand the scale of the problem we are confronting, and seek to deal with it in order to save their children and their grandchildren from paying for the spending spree of the Rudd-Gillard-Rudd era, for fear it will be taken deep into the decades ahead.

It is our responsibility—all of us, collectively, in this the 45th Parliament of Australia. It is our generation that needs to take responsibility. This parliament needs to continue slowing down Labor's debt truck, or it will speed up and compound that Rudd-Gillard-Rudd era of folly.

Members opposite should also consider that the government is, clearly, seeking to balance the task of budget repair with fundamental fairness. The child-care improvements are not a further burden on the budget, because they are funded by carefully targeted savings achieved

through administrative streamlining or by recognising the redundancy of some measures that have served their purpose. The bill passes any commonsense fairness test.

Who could sensibly argue against measures that seek to ensure we are not indefinitely paying the pensions of people who have moved outside the country permanently? Who could seriously claim that increasing the age of eligibility for Newstart allowance from 22 to 25 is somehow unreasonable, when the affected group will enjoy adequate grandfathering provisions and be able to take up benefits under a reformed youth allowance—a reformed youth allowance specifically designed to send a strong message that this Turnbull government values both earning and learning as pathways to higher employment and productivity for younger Australians?

Who could seriously argue that it is a big burden to someone under 25 who has been professionally assessed as job ready, has been assessed as having no significant barriers to taking a job and is being actively helped to get a job to wait four weeks before they can claim youth allowance? Who could seriously argue that it is not time to end another relic, the energy supplement—or carbon tax compensation, if you like—years after that tax was axed?

The measures in this bill are indeed fair. They seek to improve productivity by enhancing the child-care system and extending new opportunities to thousands of families. I support the bill and I commend it to the House.

Ms HUSAR (Lindsay) (15:34): I do hope, Member for Fairfax, that you hang around so that you can understand that your government, which has been in for four years, has actually tripled the deficit since coming into office. If you hang around, you might hear about and understand some of the people that will actually be affected by the bill you are introducing. Obviously, I am speaking of the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017.

Make no mistake, this bill has the sole purpose of stripping money from those who can least afford it. If you have never had to rely on it, Member for Fairfax, you probably would not understand what that is. It attacks pensioners, it attacks working men and women, it attacks single parents, it attacks Indigenous families, and it attacks young Australians searching for work. This government is truly shameless, and that absolute charade of a speech given just now by the member for Fairfax is more evidence.

Only a few short days ago, hundreds of thousands of low-paid workers across Australia were told they would be losing their Sunday penalty rates, resulting in a significant cut to their take-home pay. And here the Liberals are, on the very first day of parliament following that decision, once again going after the little guys. Here they are, taking money away from pensioners when we all know the age pension is barely enough to survive on now. Here they are, talking about cutting family payments and leaving 1.5 million families around Australia worse off. Shame! You should hang around, Member for Fairfax. Here they are, just weeks after this year's shameful *Closing the gap* report was handed down, talking about cutting Indigenous child-care and early learning programs. And here they are talking about cutting access to paid parental leave for mums and dads, who deserve to spend that valuable time with their newborn child.

There is nothing 'agile' or 'innovative' in this government's agenda—just cuts to programs designed to assist those people who actually need them. There is no progress to be made or

advancement to a fairer society—just plain old boring cuts. No wonder people out there in the real world think so very little of the people in this place. This constant need to rip money away from struggling people is offensive, and it illustrates perfectly the priorities of this Liberal government.

There are a number of awful measures contained within this bill, and I want to step through each of them in the time I have to speak, because I think it is important for the people in my electorate of Lindsay to understand what this government is trying to do. Some of them will be the recipients of these cuts.

Mr Turnbull will say that this bill is about reforming the child-care system and making it easier for people to work and to afford child care. What the government will not tell you is that at least one in three families will be worse off under the new system. That has obviously been left off the talking points for the other side. In fact, almost half of all families will be either worse off or no better off, despite the government spending an extra \$1.6 billion on the system by cutting a whole bunch of other important government services.

Under the new activity test, the ANU has found that 150,000 families will be worse off and many of these families will lose access to child care altogether, while 71,000 households on low incomes will have their childcare benefits cut altogether. These new rules will make it more difficult to secure child care for children whose parents are part-time and casual workers—meaning that many working mums and dads who do need more childcare assistance at the moment will end up with less.

Three hundred budget-based funded childcare programs, which mainly service rural, remote and Indigenous communities, are facing the axe. More than half of all families accessing these services will face an increase in their fees of \$4.40 per hour. That might not sound like a lot of money, but when you add it up over multiple hours and multiple children, it equates to quite a lot. The increase in fees across the course of just one day can be the difference between having food on the table at the end of the week and not. And that will be the impact of these changes. I think sadly too few people on the government side of this chamber are willing to face up to that reality. Clearly not enough people around the decision-making table truly understand how these increased costs will affect families. And that is assuming their childcare centre remains open.

Modelling by Deloitte Access Economics has shown that over two-thirds of Indigenous early childhood education services will have their funding cut and may have to close their doors. This is simply a staggering position for this government to take. And the experts in the field have warned of the consequences. The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care has said:

These changes will diminish our kids' potential to make a smooth transition to school, compounding the likelihood of intergenerational disempowerment and unemployment.

Children will fall behind before they have even started and suffer greater risks of removal into out-of-home care.

It was only a little while ago that we stood in this House while the Closing the Gap report was handed down—it actually only achieved one of its targets—and this is from a government that claims to take seriously the issues around closing the gap. It is truly unbelievable.

But it does not stop there. Next on the government's hit list are pensioners. The bill contains several measures that will strip money away from struggling pensioners. It abolishes the energy supplement to new age pensioners, meaning single people will get \$365 less and couples will have \$550 less than before. Now I am yet to meet a single age pensioner who thinks the age pension in Australia is too high. We all know it is barely enough to survive on now, and yet this government wants to reduce it even further. And that's not all. This bill will abolish the Pensioner Education Supplement, which is a payment of between \$30 and \$62 per fortnight to help those people who are studying. Under this Liberal government, 41,000 pensioners will lose their education supplement—more than 75 per cent of whom will be women. And, if you are a pensioner who spends time outside of Australia for whatever reason, the Prime Minister is coming for your pocket again. This bill will reduce the current allowable threshold of time overseas by more than three-quarters from 26 weeks to just six weeks. After that, you will be at risk of having your pension docked, no matter what your reason for travel is.

Labor will not support these cruel cuts to elderly Australians because we have our priorities set right. We think it is ridiculous for this Liberal government to go after pensioners while running a protection racket for multinational companies who refuse to pay their fair share in tax. The Prime Minister and his Liberal government want to take money from the pockets of pensioners so they can give \$50 billion away to big business and the big four banks—because they are clearly struggling. It is just so wrong, and the constituents I represent in Lindsay would never stand by and let this happen. So my message to the Prime Minister is clear: get your hands off pensioners and stop playing defence for tax-avoiding multinational companies, allowing them to slam dunk profits.

I would now like to move on to the impact this bill will have on families. The government is proposing a \$20 increase in family tax benefit payments per fortnight, but at the same time they are taking significantly more than that away by abolishing various end-of-year supplements. Family Tax Benefit A supplement is a payment to assist with the cost of raising children and is made at the end of the financial year to ensure recipients are not left with a tax debt. Currently, it is \$726 per child, and this government wants it gone. To a family struggling to get by, this supplement is sorely needed. It makes a real difference on the ground, especially to low-income families with more than one child, but under this government, Family Tax Benefit A supplement will be abolished by 2018 and Family Tax Benefit B supplement will be abolished as well, so it gets even worse—another \$354 ripped out of the budget of the poorest Australian families. On top of that, the government wants to change the rules so a single parent with a child, who is 17 and still at school, will lose their Family Tax Benefit Part B entirely. That is a cut of \$3,186 across the year. Imagine if that family is also getting a cut to their penalty rates.

How does this government expect families to get by? You cannot make all these cuts and think young kids will not be affected. You cannot slash payments like this and think that you will not put serious pressure on parents who are doing it tough as it is. These are real people, and the pain this government is inflicting on them is real as well. Under these changes, 1.5 million families will be worse off. That is not a legacy I would be proud of having, if I were on the other side. So in the interest of these Australian families, I call on the government to reconsider its cuts to families because they are doing it tough—they are trying hard and

struggling to get by. They do not deserve these callous cuts that will only make it harder for them. The government needs to get into the business of governing and find some agile solutions to some of the problems they are facing.

When you consider the government's planned changes to the paid parental leave scheme, there is yet another cut. The Prime Minister and his Liberal government want to reduce the time new mums and dads spend with their newborn children. And along the way, they are accusing mums and dads of being 'double-dippers' and 'fraudsters' if their employment agreements include their own schemes—which, if we are being honest, have mostly been fought for and traded off against other benefits in the workplace. So this government's attack on working men and women who have secured their own employer-based schemes is unwarranted and seeks to strip away workplace conditions that have been hard-won over the past decade.

Legislating a cap of paid parental leave at 20 weeks is not only against the advice of the World Health Organisation, which recommends 26 weeks off to bond with a new baby, but it punishes men and women and their employers for doing the right thing and including paid parental leave in their employment agreements. We know that as a result of these changes by the Liberals, 70,000 new mums will be affected. On the other hand, Labor is going to stand up for working mums and dads and do what we can to ensure this government does not reduce the time they can spend with their new babies.

Another incredibly cruel measure contained in this bill is the government's plan to make young job seekers live on absolutely nothing for five weeks. I did not hear the member for Fairfax refer to this part. This is just an attack on young Australians who were not lucky enough to be born into wealthy households. We keep hearing about the policy of get rich parents from the other side—I am not even sure that is a policy. How do Liberal members on the opposite side of this chamber expect people to survive with no income for five weeks? I understand you guys have an ideological obsession with attacking low-paid workers and job seekers, but in a practical sense, how do you actually see this working? Again, the member for Fairfax did not explain this part. People will starve. They will be thrown out of their houses because they cannot pay rent and they will be unable to afford their utility bills. How are young people in that kind of situation meant to look for work? It is some kind of sick joke and it is being played out every day by this government. I refuse to believe that this is the Australia our families and forefathers have worked so hard to build.

We have a social safety net in this country because we value everyone getting a fair go. We know that, when our neighbour is starving and cannot afford to keep the lights on, all of us in the community suffer. We have recognised for a long time that our social safety net for those who are struggling to get by keeps people away from crime, keeps local economies afloat and gives dignity to all Australians, which is a basic human right. This government seems to forget that and, in the end, those who will suffer most are those in the communities that the government actively ignores on a daily basis. If five weeks without an income were not bad enough, when young people under 24 do get paid this government want to give them \$48 a week less than before. These cuts are cruel and are simply unending. They have absolutely no shame in continuing these cuts against our poorest families in this country. So here we are yet again. The government are desperate to cut money in any way they can from people who are

struggling to get by and the community is waking up to their agenda of making poor people poorer still while giving big businesses a \$50 billion handout.

On the childcare package, the desperate attempt to link their dud of a policy with the vicious cuts I have outlined has been called out for what it is by at least 15 industry organisations and six major providers. It is an attack on low-paid workers and those doing their best to build a better life for themselves. The facts are simple: for every dollar of so-called new spending in this bill, \$3.30 is being ripped from pensioners, families, new mums and dads, and young Australians. Labor will not support this bill and shame on any person in this place who does. The government are like a gang of termites at a log party when it comes to cutting the living standards of low-paid workers, families and anyone who relies on our social safety net or works for penalty rates.

Ms PRICE (Durack) (15:47): I would like to bring down the tone of this very important debate and perhaps remind the member for Lindsay that we are the government. It is very easy when you are in opposition to assume that everything we are doing is bad for the community. Indeed, it is not. We are in government and that is what we intend to do. Today I rise to speak on the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017. As we have heard outlined in this debate, this is a large package with many different elements, but the content of the package is clear. The reform package will benefit around one million of the hardest-working families here in Australia. It is a shame we did not hear about those from the member for Lindsay and other speakers on the other side. These are the people who need child care in order to work and to get ahead for their families. The government intends to match that commitment with a commitment of our own.

Family tax benefit A will be increased by \$20 per fortnight for the 11,594 recipients in my electorate of Durack to help with their day-to-day costs of living. Steps are being taken to introduce a more flexible and more adaptable childcare framework that more properly reflects the nature of the modern childcare needs in Australia. The government is adapting the framework to reflect the changing nature of the work day, with more support being offered to cover childcare costs for those who are working longer hours each day or those who are working hours outside of the nine-to-five Monday-to-Friday framework, which the existing model does not support. The simple fact is that parents returning to the workforce need to return with peace of mind that their children will be looked after while they are at work. That is exactly what this package aims to do. It provides efficiency, it provides flexibility and it reflects the expectations of the modern global workforce.

Australians are competing in a global jobs marketplace which is becoming more and more competitive every day and the government is responding to that. This reform package is based around a simplification of what is currently a confusing and incredibly involved process that, unfortunately, many of our struggling, working Australians do not have the time or the energy to navigate. I can recall that feeling of confusion myself when I was using childcare providers. By simplifying the process of returning to work, we can allow our workforce to compete in that international jobs marketplace with less confusion and more certainty.

The government is in the business of making our welfare support system fair and equitable in this country. Australians expect the government to be as responsible as we possibly can be with taxpayer funds. That is their expectation and that is exactly what this legislation is about. It is a package that is designed to reward the hardworking Australians who are trying to get

ahead and are supporting families and their young children. We need to strike a balance between respectful and responsible spending and a system that gives back to and supports those who are working and supporting a young family.

The main thrust of this package is, as I have stated, about simplification and flexibility. The government, after consultation with the sector and the crossbench, has determined to not reduce the family tax benefit part B rate for single parents over the age of 60 years. This is a demographic that is likely to be retired grandparents who have stepped in to help family members at a time of need. That is being responsible and it accepts that a certain part of the demography needs a helping hand. Phasing out the family tax benefit A and B end-of-year payment, which was essentially an allowance for overpayment of the family tax benefit to go towards paying down debt instead of being returned to the government, will contribute towards the childcare subsidy to allow parents to work. It will allow parents to do what they need to do to get ahead for their family.

This change is important because it supports a strong belief of this government and of this party that the best welfare you can give someone is a job—and we have heard that a lot in this chamber, particularly from this side of the House. By supporting parents to enter into the workforce through the child-care subsidy, we are enabling parents to continue their career advancement, continue with their studies and continue their volunteer work in the community. This is vitally important, because it addresses what is really one of the most significant factors preventing parents, especially mothers, from re-entering the workforce: the fear that their children will not be properly cared for if they are not there. And this is a real and tangible fear for working women—and for working men, but particularly for working mothers; I am not ashamed to say that. And it is something that I and other parents—and I see that Minister Andrews is in the House—have all experienced firsthand.

By freeing up funding for this child-care reform package through the scaling back of the Family Tax Benefit A and B end-of-year supplements, this will help to address the funding shortfall for this child-care reform package, which is the most significant of its kind. This package will deliver benefits to one million Australian families, as I said at the start, that are most in need of our assistance. The new system will be simpler, more affordable and more flexible. It will be better targeted and provide more assistance for low- and middle-income earners. It is a shame that those opposite have not focused on that aspect of it, rather than just simply reading the Labor Party talking notes.

For some, access to child care and affordable child care can mean the difference between working and not working. Better access to child care that suits the working needs and budgets of parents will help them increase their workforce participation, should they wish to do so. For many, it will mean that there is actually a financial benefit to working that extra shift or that extra bit of overtime rather than the extra money just going to pay for child care—which is, sadly, the case at the moment.

The child-care subsidy will replace the current child-care benefit and child-care rebate with a single means-tested subsidy. The subsidy will range between 85 per cent for low-income earners and 20 per cent for high-income earners. This package is most generous to those who need the most support, and I support that 100 per cent.

This government has also taken the responsible step of repealing the energy supplement which was implemented by Labor as a scheme to buy back goodwill after the introduction of

the carbon tax. Well, since there is no carbon tax, there is no reason for an energy rebate to exist. This will deliver nearly \$1 billion in savings, which can be much better directed into other government policies, such as the NDIS Savings Fund Special Account, which is an account that has been set up to properly address the funding shortfall in the NDIS, because—and I do not need to tell you this, Mr Deputy Speaker Coulton—those opposite failed to properly fund their flagship policy when they were on this side of the chamber.

How incompetent do you have to be to not properly fund a policy platform like the NDIS—one of the most important social welfare reforms, intended to support the most vulnerable of Australians? And yet that lot over there failed to fund it and failed to plan for it. It beggars belief that this government is now left to find savings to fund the NDIS and we are getting criticised for it. This decision with respect to the energy supplement was taken on the advice from the Department of Social Services functional and efficiency review, and I think this is clear evidence that we, on this side, are not playing politics; we are being sensible with the taxpayer dollar, and it is simply commonsense responsible management of our budget bottom line. And those on the opposite side must get behind this omnibus bill so that we can start to look after the most vulnerable and get them to be supported to do the work that they want to do and support their families. I commend this bill to the House.

Dr MIKE KELLY (Eden-Monaro) (15:56): It is very important that we discuss all the full implications of this bill, which someone described as the child of Frankenstein of the 2014 budget in many ways. We have heard reference of course to the energy rebate; well, we have heard a lot from the government about soaring cost of energy—which has happened under their watch. So there has been no time when there has been a greater need for support for people dealing with those costs, which we know will come down with the greater application of renewable energy. All we need now is someone to step up and actually manage that transition and manage the grid, which is the real story.

But I particularly want to focus on one specific issue that emerges from this bill, the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017. Last year, on 26 November, I travelled to Tumut as I was deeply concerned about the impact that the changes to child-care funding would have on vital services in our region in that area—the Snowy Valleys south-west slopes area. The Snowy Valleys Council had written to me stating that their mobile child-care service, Puggles, would have its funding cut, and rural and remote families in the region would not have access to quality child-care services.

I met with parents from all over that south-west slopes region who were deeply worried that the award-winning mobile child-care service that they relied on, Puggles, would no longer be available for their children. The Puggles mobile children's services van, run by the Snowy Valleys Council, has provided services to rural and remote venues across southern New South Wales for the past 16 years. The federal government was seeking to introduce the family assistance legislation amendment bill 2016; at that stage, the criteria for funding were unclear and there was no guarantee that services like Puggles would have continued to receive funding.

This year I am even more disappointed, as the government is seeking to introduce the social security omnibus bill that provides even less certainty for Puggles children's services and to the people who utilise that service. The social security omnibus bill is designed to

streamline child-care arrangements as a budget savings measure, but it fails to take into account the differing circumstances of delivering services to rural and remote communities.

The Snowy Valleys Council have had modelling done on the impact that the streamlining will have on their mobile child-care services. This indicates that, if a new funding package is introduced, Puggles will have to cease servicing two of the six venues it currently services. And it is likely that increased costs will reduce enrolments at other centres owned by the council. This threatens the overall viability of that service. These changes also stand to impact the 85 children and 70 families that use the Puggles service in the region, as they will have reduced access and ultimately no access at all to this service. We know that quality child care plays such an important part in the development of young people, and for these children to have their service reduced or cut is just not good enough.

The Puggles mobile children's service ensures that our remote children are receiving six hours of early education a week. It is a recommendation that children receive 15 hours of early education a week and, as a result of the government's proposed changes, parents are seeing that their children will receive no early education—so not just not meeting the recommended levels but nothing at all.

Sheridan IngoId, a local parent speaking at the meeting that I mentioned in Tumut said, 'Puggles provides a service for our children to thrive and get early intervention and education care where otherwise they would miss out. It also serves as a hub for families to meet and socialise in our small village.' Award-winning childcare teacher, Kylie Wilesmith, who manages the Puggles children's service, stated that there was much to be lost in our area if these reforms go ahead. If passed in its current form, this policy will render many budget-based funded mobile children's services unviable, with the likely result that the early education and care of isolated children will suffer. It is deeply concerning that the mainly Aboriginal community of Brungle is set to be impacted by these changes.

The early years are the best opportunity to lay a solid foundation for a child's future. Time and money spent in the years before school have been shown to be a much more cost-effective investment than investments made at any other time. The skills that children gain as pre-schoolers form the basis for later skill development. As a result of a quality education before school, children enter school with marked differences in the cognitive, emotional, attention-related, self-regulatory, learning and social skills needed for success in the school environment, and these differences influence later academic success. Mobile children's services provide flexible, responsive, innovative services to children and families experiencing social, geographical cultural or economic isolation. The children that access services through Puggles stand to lose much more than a service; they stand to have their future negatively impacted.

It is clear from my regular community meetings in Eden-Monaro that both the New South Wales and federal coalition governments are simply out of touch on this issue. They refuse to explain their policy decisions to the community, they are too lazy to run proper community consultation processes and they are hypersensitive to criticism. While all governments should constantly monitor how efficiently funding arrangements are being delivered—and I am certainly happy to concede that—if they want to make changes, the important thing is to bring everyone along. Our mobile childcare services and parents are being left completely in the dark on this matter.

I have mentioned in the past that this is compounding the very serious body of issues that particularly the people I see in country New South Wales are really rising up to exhibit and voice their concerns over. It is building on all of the grievances that they have that have been developing over a period of time now at both the state and federal levels. We have seen what happened with the backpackers tax; the Gonski changes, meaning that the loading for regional schools and Indigenous kids is not being applied; the NBN stuff-ups that we are having in rural and regional areas; the forced mergers of our councils; the greyhounds issue; the privatisation of hospitals being mooted and the loss of funding for those regional hospitals; and electricity privatisation and all the things that we flagged that would happen with that—for example, the security issues that fell out of the Ausgrid sale and the gaming of the system now by a lot of private companies that have taken over the delivery of electricity services, which has caused a lot of the problems that we have been seeing.

We have seen the attacks on our TAFEs all around the country. In New South Wales country areas that is having a serious effect. We have seen the draconian fracking protest laws on our farmers who are worried about the impacts of GSG. And there has, of course, been the failure to come to grips with the impacts of climate change on our farmers. I was pleased to meet with our Farmers For Climate Action, who really understand both the challenges and opportunities that we have here if we get our policy settings right. There has also been the Centrelink debacle, which is playing out very badly in rural areas, where people who really depend on that personal and face-to-face support are now being targeted and persecuted by this mail-out program which has driven many of them to contemplate suicide. I am pleased that the wonderful people in my electorate offices have been effectively acting as adjuncts of Centrelink to deal with that issue. We have also seen veterans forced into the situation where they do not have the opportunity to have a face-to-face with support—forcing everyone to try to do all of these services online. We are also seeing a loss of services in banks and railway stations and the like.

But the latest blow that our country areas are facing relates to this penalty rates issues. In general terms, the impact on rural communities was spelled out in a McKell Institute study, which said that the retail and hospitality sectors account for some 18 per cent of all rural workers. The partial adjustment to these penalty rates was also looked at in that study. The average income earned by workers in retail and hospitality was evidenced to be the lowest of any industry. If you are talking about multipliers like double time et cetera, it is like the old saying 'two-fifths of bugger all'. These are very low wages that we are talking about. That multiplier effect was what enabled these people to put food on the table. In my region, a lot of people only get to work two to three days a week with these jobs. So it is absolutely critical that they have that penalty rate mechanism.

The McKell study highlighted that the income of these groups of workers, who are already the lowest income recipients in the country and in rural Australia, would be playing out dramatically through the reduction in the disposable income of those workers, because there would be less money going into the local economy. The very businesses where these workers work depend on people being able to afford to come into them to buy their coffee or to buy their food in that discretionary opportunity. That is going to really suffer a huge dent with the lack of that money flowing through the economy.

The McKell study said that a partial abolition of penalty rates in the retail and hospitality sectors would result in workers in rural Australia losing between \$370 million to \$691 million per annum and in a loss in disposable income of between \$174 million to \$343 million per annum to local economies in rural Australia. We can imagine what the impact of that will be. Specifically in New South Wales, we are looking at the loss of between \$118 million and \$220 million per annum, and the impact on the local rural economies' disposable income would be in the order of up to \$106 million. So we can see generally what the impact is going to be, but in relation to Eden-Monaro, one of the most vulnerable electorates in the entire nation, we know what the community feels about this because we have been extensively surveyed. In particular, only a few months ago a survey conducted by ReachTEL found that nearly 60 per cent of my community is opposed to plans to cut penalty rates, with 17 per cent undecided. It remains a very hot issue for us. The opposition to the cut was strongest amongst women, who will be deeply affected by this, and those aged between 18 and 34—as we have heard, young people will also suffer greatly. A poll also conducted by ReachTEL, of people in Queanbeyan and Canberra, found that 79 per cent supported penalty rates, with only 12 per cent opposed. So we know that in my region not only is it something that will have a massive impact but it is something that the community does not want.

If we are talking about tribunals, the ultimate tribunal for all of us in this place is the tribunal of the people—and the people have spoken loud and clear across this nation on this issue. We can talk about the acceptance of decisions, but decisions are made by tribunals all the time. It is like decisions that are made by the High Court. Decisions made by tribunals pose policy issues for this parliament and for governments. It is up to us then to deal with the challenges that decisions of tribunals might present. In this case, this is a very clear situation where a policy response is called for. What we need is a floor that preserves the ability for enterprise agreements to also adjust these matters in exchange for benefits, and that was the piece missing from the arguments put forward by the Prime Minister today. Absolutely, we accept the protection and the strength of unions to achieve agreements that deliver better outcomes for people in exchange for productivity or other trade-offs. Of course no-one is objecting to that, but what we are seeing here is the potential for a very important floor to be pulled out from under workers, which will influence the way future enterprise agreements are negotiated. So we need this situation addressed.

In the time left to me, I will also point out the local impact of the proposed move of the Australian Pesticides and Veterinary Medicines Authority from Canberra to Armidale. This is having a severe effect on my own electorate. Employees across the board are being cut from the Public Service and agricultural agencies, but we are really suffering from the impact that this will have on the capacity that the APVMA used to have, in the face of a cost-benefit analysis that showed that there was absolutely very limited benefit but plenty of cost associated with this move. We are talking about \$26 million in moving costs, \$157 million pulled from the local economy and a staff of 200, more than half of whom will not move. An internal strategy reveals that the government will struggle to move even 10 of the authority's 103 regulatory scientists. The specialised nature of that work means legal compliance and licensing divisions are also unlikely to move. This is having an impact on the capacity of our government to effectively service our rural industries.

One other issue that is having a big effect on rural Australia is the failure of the Black Spot Program, which the Australian National Audit Office highlighted was skewed politically. The criteria being used to determine the location of blackspots infrastructure were deeply flawed. The money is largely being spent in areas that already had some coverage and not in the areas that really need it. This is a damning record and I hope that the government starts listening to fine rural members like you, Mr Deputy Speaker Coulton, and addresses these issues. (*Time expired*)

Mr CREWTHER (Dunkley) (16:11): I rise today to discuss the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017 and the important benefits it brings to families in my electorate of Dunkley. This savings package was announced before my time in the parliament, in the 2015-16 budget, but it is a package that I wholeheartedly support and want to see passed through this House. This is the single largest investment in early learning and child care that this country has ever seen. We are working to ensure that every child has access to high-quality education and care but through reforms that are fairer and sustainable. It would be a disservice to our own children to implement a high-cost, sensationalist type program in the style of those opposite, only to find that there is no funding and no long-term perspective and for the program to be withdrawn again. What kind of care does this provide for our children? We need these reforms to support the nurturing of all Australian children in a responsible, sustainable and fair way. The reforms contained in the omnibus legislation ensure a high standard of child care for all children, not just those whose parents can afford it. We are enabling young parents to get back to work, to develop self-sufficiency and to provide for their families. By providing an increase in the safety net for paid parental leave and increased fortnightly rates of family payments, I am proud to say that the Turnbull coalition government is empowering young families and helping them participate in an economy that will construct their children's social environment in the future.

The Turnbull coalition government has always stated that the childcare reforms need to be paid for by the savings from the family tax benefit. The family tax benefit funding has always been for families—for children—but every dollar spent on child care must provide both a productivity lift and a participation lift to the economy. In the September quarter last year, in my electorate of Dunkley there were over 10,000 families receiving family tax benefit A and over 8,000 families receiving family tax benefit B, both figures a little over the national average for that quarter. This legislation is of great importance to my electorate and the young families who have chosen to make Dunkley their home. This legislation gives parents more choice and more opportunity to work while knowing that their child is not going to be prevented from having access to quality childcare facilities.

The Turnbull coalition government, indeed, has a plan to provide children with a high-quality early education. Some of the most important social and intellectual skills develop at an early age, particularly between the ages of zero and five. This means that, by improving our childcare system, we are setting our children up with a better start for their educational life. We believe in giving people the opportunity to get ahead—both families and the 8,530 Dunkley children currently using childcare services locally.

We have no reservations in supporting families who rely on child care to go to work. For some families, access to child care can mean the difference between working and not working. More affordable access to child care puts the opportunity of work within reach for

many more families. These families are the primary beneficiaries of this legislation. These are the families who may need only a little more assistance, a little more support, to go back to work. We, the coalition, are giving them that opportunity.

I spoke in this chamber during the last sitting week about my concern for the fate of this legislation in the hands of the opposition. They have previously indicated their intention to block the savings measures. You really do have to wonder: 'Is it recklessness? Is it apathy?' Or do they just not care about families who work hard to give their children the best opportunities possible?' These reforms to social services and child care are long overdue. Labor did not support reform to family payments in the previous parliament, but I urge them to do so now.

Our reforms will give hardworking low-income families an 85 per cent subsidy. This means, for example, that a family on an income of \$60,000 per year—of which there are many in Dunkley—would only pay around \$15 per day at a childcare centre whose daily fees are around \$100. These reforms deliver the highest rate of subsidy for those who most need it. This bill and the resulting reforms strike the right balance between efficient investments in family welfare and quality education for the children of some of the most vulnerable members of our society. The hardest-working, lowest-earning families are the ones in Labor's sights, should they oppose this legislation.

This package is expected to help more than 230,000 families to increase their involvement in paid employment, and the overall investment is estimated to benefit almost one million families. We want families to choose their child care around their work rather than limit their work hours to suit their child care. We should not be inhibiting parents and carers who seek employment and attempt to support their own families through work. This is a wonderful piece of legislation. This is about spending taxpayers' money smarter and spending on those who need it most for the greatest benefit to our communities. We, the Turnbull coalition government, understand that parents are under enormous pressure every day that goes by to make choices that are in the best interests of their families. My wife, Grace, and I are constantly seeking the best opportunities available for our 18-month-old daughter, Yasmin. So we fully appreciate and understand the importance of giving parents access to quality childcare facilities and of having the opportunities to go back to work. That is why it is with the utmost respect and sympathy that I fight for my constituents and I fight for the families of Dunkley in this chamber and on this bill today.

There are a couple of select features of this legislation that I would like to focus on a little further. First, we are abolishing the current \$7,500 childcare rebate cap for families earning up to about \$185,000. Second, the cap will be increased to \$10,000 for families earning above this amount. There should be no limit to the amount of assistance that parents can receive in order to work more to support their families and to provide opportunities for their children. Without the successful passage of this childcare legislation, around 130,000 families are expected to hit the childcare rebate cap in 2018-19. Our reforms will mean that 90,000 of these families will no longer have to worry about a cap and a further 40,000 families will still benefit from the planned increase in the annual cap for high-income earners from \$7,500 to \$10,000. These amounts are for each child, meaning that families with more than one child will not be disadvantaged.

Conversely, contained in an earlier part of the omnibus legislation, an hourly fee cap will be implemented to put pressure on childcare fees to decrease. The Productivity Commission found that the average annual increase in long-day daycare fees accelerated when the childcare rebate was increased in 2008. This increase was accompanied by neither control over the artificial inflation of childcare fees nor a proportionate increase in workforce participation. Families have a right to a reference point to hold to account providers who raise their fees unnecessarily and to know what acceptable fee rates are.

The other component that I want to draw attention to is the activity test that we are implementing to ensure that the greatest assistance is given to those who need it most. Currently, recipients do not need to demonstrate any activity or need for childcare support to receive a degree of subsidised care. Therefore, in order to provide support to those families reliant on child care to work, train, study or volunteer, it is critical to distinguish between those families and the families who do not require the assistance. Assistance of this manner must be prioritised for those who need it the most. Therefore, the more hours that a parent works, studies, trains, volunteers or looks for work, the greater number of hours of subsidised child care they will be able to access. Up to 100 hours of subsidised care will be available per fortnight. This is how we, as a government, are accountable to the Australian people. Faith has been placed in us that we will use taxpayers' money in the most productive way possible, so I am very pleased that included in this legislation is a method like this that ensures the funding goes to those who need it most.

Critically, however, welfare of the children from some of the most disadvantaged families comes first. The activity test is based over a three-month period, recognising the unpredictability of casual work and irregular hours. The activity test will be waived altogether for families on incomes of \$65,000 or less and for grandparents who are the primary carers. We know that children from disadvantaged backgrounds benefit the most from quality child care and early childhood education. Central to this legislation is the consistency and quality of child care, and we will not let children from disadvantaged backgrounds—in Dunkley or elsewhere in Australia—miss out.

I am proud to be a part of the Turnbull coalition government presenting this bill. In addition to committing \$840 million over 2016 and 2017 to guarantee federal support for a maximum of 600 hours of preschool in the year before a child begins formal schooling, we are providing increased access to better-quality childcare centres for thousands of families, including the 6,040 families using approved childcare providers in my electorate of Dunkley. Approximately 10,000 families in my electorate will receive an additional \$20 in family tax benefits per child per fortnight, in addition to the childcare rebates and subsidies that I have been discussing. We have 105 approved childcare provider services in Dunkley looking after the early childhood education for thousands of young children, such as my daughter Yasmin—for example, Long Island child care on the edge of Frankston and Seaford; Mount Eliza House in Mount Eliza; and Good Start Early Learning in both Frankston and Langwarrin.

I am proud to be a part of a government that is ensuring all children have access to quality early learning and care and is helping thousands of parents get back to work and increase their work hours without some of the financial barriers they were subject to previously. I call on those members opposite to support this legislation for the sake of my constituents in Dunkley,

for families in Dunkley, for the children in Dunkley and for families and children right across Australia.

Ms McGOWAN (Indi) (16:23): I want to start of this speech with a story. The story took place about 21 years ago in a rural community in southern New South Wales. I was working as a rural consultant and I had been invited to this meeting to talk about service provision in country towns. As we gathered the women together from the farms we heard the story of a father. He told us how recently he had had an accident on his farm. He had a child on his tractor. The child was hurt, so he took the child to the local hospital for attention. It was the child's mother who was the nurse on duty at the emergency centre who looked after the child. The father told this story to a group of us country people who cared about services. The father, the mother and the community asked: 'What would it take for us to have child care? What would it take for us so that a man farming on his farm and a woman working in the local town could have their children cared for by professional carers?' That story so resounded in that community that they got organised and formed a committee, as you do in country towns, and began work on designing a service that would meet the childcare needs of farm families in small rural communities.

So it is with some degree of déjà vu that I stand in parliament today, 20 years after the report *Country kids—who cares?: child care a work related issue for farm families* was written, and say that many of the issues identified 20 years ago are still unaddressed by this legislation. So I am particularly focusing my comments today on the Jobs for Families Child Care Package. I want to make a plea to my colleagues, particularly those who represent rural communities, to pay attention to this legislation. I believe it fails to address the needs of, in particular, farm families. It fails to address the needs of working parents in small rural communities.

I have been working very closely with the minister around these issues and I would like to acknowledge and thank him and his staff and the departmental staff, who have given me a lot of time and have listened to my concerns. They have committed to me that they have paid attention and that, in the development of the guidelines associated with this legislation, they will address my concerns. But how sad it is that when we have legislation like this before the House today we have to pay attention to unwritten, unreleased guidelines and rely on the minister, who said: 'Cross my heart. Trust me, Cathy: we will address this.' I want to take this opportunity to say that that is not nearly good enough. In designing childcare packages for all Australians, we need to put the needs of rural and regional Australians front and centre. I have to say how incredibly disappointing it is when people say: 'We will make special provisions for those disadvantaged people. We will make special provisions for those who just cannot get to a childcare centre.' I say that rural and regional Australia should never be regarded as disadvantaged and particularly the farming families of rural Australia should never be regarded as disadvantaged. We are mainstream parts of this country. We work really hard to produce the commodities that make this country flourish. As families who work to do that, we deserve to have our needs front and centre of this legislation. Sadly, they are not.

I have a few things I want to talk about. One is how government goes about making sure that rural and regional Australia is front and centre. How do we design services that meet the needs of farming families? How is it that we can take into account the particular needs of this particular group that I am speaking for today? I want to take the opportunity to read a couple

of case studies from the report *Country kids—who cares?* that was prepared 20 years ago. I want to quote Nerida. Nerida is a dairy farmer and she said: 'Dairy farming is constant work. We milk the cows twice a day for nine months of the year. Some dairy farmers milk 365 days of the year. It begins in the early morning, starting around six, and goes until eight or nine when you come home for breakfast. Then it is off to do the day's farm work, with milking again in the late afternoon. The day's farm work usually finishes around 7 pm. These hours make it difficult to get people to come in and mind the children on the farm. But it is also impossible to get to a childcare centre, if there was one.' Nerida's neighbour would occasionally look after the children. She charged X dollars an hour. The nearest child care centre was 20 kilometres away, a round trip of 40 kilometres. Nerida said: 'I refuse to drag children out of bed so early in the morning and take them 40 kilometres for child care.'

Another little case study was about Marilla. The report says: 'Marilla and her husband have three children and they live in a community that is 100 kilometres away from the nearest childcare service. Marilla has no extended family living in the area. When necessary, her husband or neighbours provide child care. But it is difficult to ask a neighbour to look after three children when she is already busy on her own farm and has two or three children of her own. She says, "If it is necessary, I split the children up between neighbours. But each trip involves me taking them 15 or 20 kilometres." Marilla says that when shearing or tractor driving on the farm during cropping they employ a local woman to mind the two year old. 'The trips to town for appointments or for business can be a logistical nightmare. Sometimes I have to worry for a week as to how I can possibly get all of the jobs done to be back in time for the school bus. I normally only go into town once a week for shopping and farm business, and then it is incredibly stressful.'

What happened as a result of this report was that a childcare service was designed to specifically meet the needs of rural and farming families. It was called Mobile Child Care. Mobile Child Care was based in the Albury-Wodonga community childcare hub. It now employs 50 qualified staff. They have cars and they go out to the communities. They work in halls. They have renovated the community halls. They have got them all licenced. The mothers and fathers of these rural communities can now take their children to the local hall for occasional child care, long day care, after-school care—depending on what the need is. This has been a magnificent service in my local community that has really met the needs of the community. But, sadly, with the changes that are going to come in, that local service says it can no longer do what it needs to do.

The minister has said he would address it. But what is so sad about this particular bit of legislation is that it has not taken best practice into account, it has not taken the needs of agricultural industries into account, it has not taken the needs and the work of these really skilled childcare workers. So they are extraordinarily skilled people; they are not only qualified childcare workers. They go into the community, they take information with them, they provide support to the farming family and, if it is appropriate, they can refer to other services that are available. They do community development when there is a need. They can talk about how else the needs of families can be met. So these workers are, in fact, community builders. They save the government hundreds and thousands of dollars by making our rural communities work better. Sadly, they do not fit this model.

So what is wrong with this model? This model is based on what we call centre care. This model is really good if you live in a town and you have a centre base. The model is no good if you live in a small country town and you do not have a critical mass to support a centre. Many of our communities are not large enough for a centre-based child care. I really want to make sure that the minister actually understands that what he is doing meets the needs of a lot of people for sure. But there is a really significant amount of people in rural and regional Australia who are being marginalised by this change. And it is such a pity.

I want to talk a little bit about one of the things that happened in my adventures with trying to fix this up. You can imagine the angst that came to my community when they heard that the childcare legislation meant that their wonderfully loved service was no longer going to be provided. So they have been lobbying me, the member for Farrer and anyone that would listen. One of things we did was put a number of questions in writing through the system—question number 25, 'Budget-based funding services'. We asked the minister to tell us what impact study had been undertaken with this legislation so that at least we knew that when the government was making the changes it did it in full knowledge of the impact of this change. The answer came back—question number 25, answer number 5:

A Regional Australia Impact Statement was not required, as discussed with the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development, because the circumstances of all families, including families in regional and remote areas, were taken into account in developing the Package upon which the legislation is based ...

I would like to say: somewhere someone is not telling the full truth.

The communities that I represent are loud and clear in saying that their needs have not been taken into account. They are being asked to transition. And 'transition' is a magic word; my community says to me, 'Transition to what?' The minister tells me, 'We'll put a granting process in place and communities can apply for grants to do transition.' I say, 'Minister, there's nothing to transition to. There are no services in these towns. There's no centre. If we don't have mobile childcare services, there's nowhere to go.' While all of us love the opportunity for a grant, for those of us who live in rural and regional Australia—and, let me say, I have had 20 years of applying for grants, of demonstrating innovation and of demonstrating how my particular circumstances warrant special treatment—it is a horrible way to have to justify what is a mainstream service for the city people, which is child care. Why should rural and regional Australia have to apply for a grant and special conditions, and demonstrate innovation when we have as legitimate needs for child care as everybody else.

I was so disappointed to read that answer. I have to say to the bureaucrats involved: do not do that to me again. Undertake rural and regional impact statements. In particular, to the Department of Infrastructure and Regional Development: if you are undertaking major changes to the way fundamental services are provided in Australia, you must, as a matter of good governance, do the research to show how it is going to impact, and then put in place the necessary changes to make sure there are no unintended consequences that disadvantage a huge sector of the population. To that end, I have moved at an earlier time the Charter of Budget Honesty statement. And that charter, if we could bring it on to debate in this House, would do exactly that—it would make sure that every major change has an impact statement so that we understand how it is going to impact on our communities.

In bringing my comments to a close and in foreshadowing that I will be making amendments in the third reading stage of this legislation, I would like to acknowledge and thank the minister. He has certainly given me a really good hearing. I am sure that he understands my issues. I would like to acknowledge the public servants that we have met and who have given a lot of time and energy for this. I would particularly like to acknowledge the work of Anne Bowler, who is the national president of NAMS, the National Association of Mobile Services. She has worked so hard in a voluntary capacity to have these issues addressed. To Anne and all your colleagues: we began the fight 20 years ago. We will not give it up now. We know that rural and regional Australians deserve excellent service, and I will be your voice in this parliament to make sure it happens.

I would also like to acknowledge the work of Rodney Wangman, the chief executive officer of the Albury-Wodonga Community College. Rod, you have been the auspice body of the mobile childcare centre. You have seen it through 20 really good years. My commitment is that we are not going to let it go. We have a really good model, and we will continue to work with the government to make sure that in the long term we find a system that actually works for us—a place-based system, a whole-of-family system, a children's services system that acknowledges how important our children are and does not make them an add on extra, grant, innovation, apply-for system. This fight has really just begun, and I am not to let it go.
(Time expired)

Mr VAN MANEN (Forde—Government Whip) (16:38): I rise to speak in support of the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017 in its original form, which will deliver more affordable, flexible and accessible child care for Australian families. I am a huge supporter of the fantastic work that our local childcare centres do in my electorate of Forde. Every year I get around to visit as many centres as possible. It is a great opportunity to hear from teachers, the directors of the centres and families and gain some valuable insights into the tremendous work they are doing with those young kids in our community. It is also a great opportunity for me to support the centres and the kids by donating a number of books and other learning materials. I believe one of the most important things we can do is to give our kids a head start and encourage a love of reading. Every time I drop in to donate books I have the pleasure of taking some time with the kids, reading them a story and enjoying some fun with them in the process.

Early education starts in our local childcare centres, and every family deserves the ability to access affordable child care when they need it. The problem is the current system is no longer working. I have heard from families and childcare workers who tell me the childcare rebate just does not stretch far enough. Families are running out of the rebate too soon and it is having a negative impact on their household budgets. Many families, who have mum and dad both working to get ahead to provide for their families and pay off a mortgage, are frustrated with the current system because the rising cost of childcare fees makes working a second job almost not worth the effort. One mother told me that after paying for childcare fees and exhausting the childcare rebate she was basically working for \$5 per hour and wondering, what is the point?

It is clear from the discussions I have had with many people across my community that Australians want better and more affordable child care. This government, through this package of measures, is determined to deliver it. This legislation delivers the most significant

reform to the funding of early childhood education and the childcare system in 40 years. The Coalition will deliver new agreements to better target support towards hard-working Australian families who are earning the least and working the longest hours. More than one million families will benefit from the government's reforms to make childcare more affordable, flexible and accessible.

This package of measures will abolish Labor's cap on the \$7,500 childcare rebate, giving more incentive to parents who want to be in the workforce to find work or to work more hours. The cap will be abolished for families earning less than around \$185,000. The government will also increase the subsidy rate to 85 per cent for the lowest-earning families and taper that down so it is lower for families earning the most. This will ensure that families earning the least will benefit from the greatest percentage of childcare rebate.

The government wants families to have the freedom to choose their child care around their work, rather than limit their work hours to suit their child care. It is estimated that this reform will encourage more than 230,000 families to increase their involvement in paid employment, which will have a positive impact on our economy.

When Labor increased the rate of the childcare rebate in July 2008, childcare fees accelerated dramatically. We will seek to ensure that history does not repeat itself by putting an hourly fee cap in place. Since being in government the coalition has already brought annual childcare price increases down to around six percent, far less than the spike in fees of 14 per cent under Labor.

I am proud to say that this legislation will make Australia's childcare system more affordable, flexible and accessible. It also implements the necessary budget savings to fund these reforms in a responsible way. I have just heard the contribution in regard to the budget-based funded childcare services. We are aware that we need to ensure we provide a solution across the country. Centres in remote and rural areas, which provide tremendous service to their communities, will be transitioned over the next few years to the new model so we have a common model across the country. They will also have opportunities for some additional assistance, and overall the funding increase to those services as a result of the new changes will increase to about \$110 million, compared to approximately \$62 million at present. That will alleviate the concerns expressed by the member earlier. We are putting more money into those regional, rural and remote childcare centres and assisting those families.

The Australian people elected a coalition government to bring the budget back into order and to make the changes that are necessary to create opportunities for all Australians. This omnibus savings bill is part of that process. It allows us to continue the work necessary to deliver on budget reform. We cannot continue to manage a budget by borrowing. It is important that in the context of managing the budget, we seek to live within our means. As a coalition government, we have consistently indicated that the decisions and the changes we are making are designed to achieve that outcome.

We have already been forced to defer the start date of the childcare reform package for more than 12 months because of Labor's failure to support these necessary savings and yet it is the families in electorates like Forde and many others around this country, which those opposite purport to support, who are paying directly the price for Labor's intransigence in blocking these changes. We can no longer live off the credit card of future generations, and that means funding childcare reforms with savings from the family tax benefit. The family tax

benefit reform package will not only deliver record levels of childcare support to families who need it most, but it will also deliver sustainability to the family payment system. And that is important, because we want a family payment system that not only supports and is sustainable for current families but also provides support and sustainability for families of the future. It will mean almost 100,000 low-income families will get up to an extra two weeks paid parental leave by increasing paid parental leave to 20 weeks. And around 1.2 million families will get up to \$20 per fortnight more in family tax benefit payments to help them with day-to-day expenses, including more than 15,000 families in my electorate of Forde. These changes are on top of the benefits working families will receive through removing the cap on the childcare rebate and increasing the subsidy rate to 85 per cent.

When it comes to reforming the broken childcare system, it is this side of the House that is providing solutions for our families—not those opposite. Unlike those opposite, who went to the election promising to continue the current system only to undermine their stance more recently, it is this government that has put the time and effort in to consult with parents, families and childcare providers. We have listened to input from the Productivity Commission and two Senate inquiries to present a package that we know will make child care more affordable and accessible for those who need it most. The coalition government's childcare reform will help so many hard working families right around the country. It will provide more opportunities for parents thinking of going back to work or working more hours as the opportunities arise. It will provide parents working part time with the affordable and flexible child care they need to increase their hours—and make working more worthwhile. I believe this legislation will make a tremendous difference to the hardworking families in my electorate of Forde, and I commend this bill in its original form to the House.

Mr HILL (Bruce) (16:48): I may be new here but much of the content of the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017 is not; it well predates me. Fundamentally, it recycles the same old tired cuts that the previous parliament rejected. And for those who were here in the previous parliament, you would feel like the proverbial goldfish going around in the bowl—'We've been here before, we've been here before, we've been here before; we say no, we say no'—but still they come back. So here we go again, debating the same old cuts that hit the poor.

These zombie budget measures—as they are called—these fantasy cuts that just will not die—actually, to keep calm in question time during one of the more ridiculous moments with the Deputy Prime Minister, I googled 'zombies'. In my view, these zombie budget measures are worse than zombies, because in fact there are ways to kill zombies. You have to lop off the cranium, destroy their brains. Google does warn you not to underestimate how difficult that is to do, to kill a zombie, but I have to say I think it is easier to do that than making these cruel, unfair cuts go away. Indeed, I am at a loss to understand where the government's brain would be to kill them, given how brain dead their actual policy agenda seems to be.

We have a few additional cuts to families, to pensioners, to young people looking for work, and of course the old paid parental leave 'double dipping' chestnut set up against child care. It is truly heartwarming stuff. So it should be no surprise that Labor does not and will not support this bill. It is further evidence of the government's complete inability to govern, which means presenting ideas in a coherent way, having a conversation and listening to criticism. We heard the member for Indi make reasonable points. You would think that those in

government who claim to represent rural and regional Australia may even listen to them and do something about them, but no. The government could have put forward a childcare package that encourages workforce participation, maximises human capital through early childhood development—given the evidence is clear—and provides parents with the support and certainty they need. But they chose not to.

I will say at the outset that some parts of this package are worthy of support; they are not all bad. Things like combining the two parenting payments into one—that is good stuff. But the government just cannot help themselves, and there are two fundamental problems. Firstly, the current package spends \$1.6 billion on changes that will leave one-in-three families worse off—and that is an independent analysis by the ANU—and it especially hurts some of the most disadvantaged children. It halves access to early education for many children in low-income families and it fails to guarantee the direct subsidies to services accessed by thousands of children in mostly rural and regional communities—for the most part, Indigenous children. I was moved by the description by the member for Indi of the impact on her electorate, a part of the state that I know well. Her point that farmers and rural communities are not some kind of add-on extra to Australian society is well made. It should not have to be made, but it was well made. And this model does not work for small centres outside towns. If these services cannot continue without ongoing support, and we know that, you would think the government might provide some support. No, but just last sitting week this place was filled with talk of closing the gap on development outcomes for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children, yet the original target on access to early childhood education for Indigenous children, for four year olds, expired unmet years ago and this legislation will further hurt access for Aboriginal children. It is rank hypocrisy.

The second problem of course is playing parliamentary games by holding investment in child care to ransom by bundling it together in one big bill with other cuts. It is a tactic and it is a scam. We are being asked to pit family against family. When you do the math on this bill, in total the government wants to take \$3.30 off pensioners, new mums, families, young Australians, for every dollar they then put back into child care. And among the many cuts we are being asked to okay today are: reducing the pension after six weeks overseas if you are a migrant who has only contributed to the Australian economy for, say, 34 years rather than 35; abolishing the pensioner education supplement and the education entry payment; abolishing the energy supplement for new welfare recipients; and increasing the age of eligibility for Newstart from 22 to 25 years, further demeaning young people trying to find work. You can vote in three federal elections but apparently the government still considers you some kind of weird 'youth' unworthy of support that is barely adequate to sustain independent life. These measures have appeared again and again in different bits of legislation. They are still in other bills on the *Notice Paper* resurrected again and again, but you cannot polish a turd and the government continues to try—it is a bit like the Prime Minister's leadership. There is no shame in the government's efforts to hit pensioners, families and young people where it hurts.

I will point out a couple of things about budget repair and the economic impact. In the scheme of the stuff-up that the government is making and how badly they are stuffing the deficit, these are relatively modest contributions to fiscal and budget repair. But in terms of economic impact, these areas have to be the worst places you would look for cuts. Because if you are taking money from those at the very bottom, who spend every dollar that you give

them as the evidence shows, you are going to have most impact on the real economy. These are the people who have least to begin with so, once again, this proposal will target the poor, the vulnerable and the striving to make inroads to budget repair.

Labor continues to fight measures that shield the wealthy from the burden of budget reform, fuel inequality and further wealth disparity in this country. We showed the ability in my first week or two in this chamber last year to compromise and to push through a lot of savings in the omnibus savings bill. There was difficult compromise, and we need to do more of it—there is no shame in it—but not here. There are lines that should not be crossed. Time and time again though, the government keeps trying to pick on the poor and the vulnerable, and we will have no part of it. We did of course at the election outline a range of other budget measures to deal with the fiscal situation, many for which we were clobbered on the head relentlessly about—superannuation, VET funding rorts—and then the government kind of snuck up to the line and put them through, albeit in some kind of bastardised fashion.

We also proposed revenue measures. That is right, the 'r' word—revenue. The member for Forde and I have got a bit of a buzzword bingo game going—having a little giggle—over keyword phrases. 'Jobs and growth' has not had much of an outing this year. We all hear 'CFMEU' and 'stop the boats'. But another one that is really doing the rounds at the moment is 'live within our means'—we have to 'live within our means'. The member for Forde told us about 'living within our means'. It is a cute phrase and it is hard to argue with. But for those opposite, it is actually just code for cuts that hurt everyday Australians. How is it going? Net debt is \$100 billion up; the deficit has tripled. They never seem, when they say it, to mean making sure that we have the means to live.

Ordinary people pay tax, and the Liberals seem to think that is okay. But, somehow, when we talk about tax avoidance for the very wealthy or multinationals who pay nothing or large companies, who find paying tax in this country optional, somehow that is class war. 'Living within our means', for me, means behaving like a grown up and putting the budget onto a sustainable path. It means as a community we need to and have the right to decide what kind of society we want to live in. We have to look at spending and we have to look at revenue. You can imagine a world where society decided what was important, what was needed, what kind of community we wanted to be and then constructed a budget around that—just imagine. But that kind of imagination is sadly lacking by the small minded bean counters opposite.

It is not just me who says this though. The Salvation Army, in its submission to the Senate Community Affairs Legislation Committee into one of the previous guises of this bill—the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Budget Repair) Bill 2016—which still hangs around as one of those zombies on the *Notice Paper* with some of the same garbage in it, said:

The Salvation Army strongly recommends the government ensures any reforms to balance the budget focus on both revenue and expenditure and not unfairly focus funding cuts on vulnerable groups who can least afford to be further marginalised.

It is not rocket surgery—one of my favourite Warwick Capper quotes; although apparently the original has to be attributed to Chris Rock in a comedy show. So for both core reasons—the impact of the childcare package on vulnerable and disadvantaged children, and the tactic of bundling massive cuts in the same bill—Labor must oppose this legislation. I do wish the government would stop playing parliamentary games, decouple these harsh cuts, and sit down and discuss the package to improve it. I urge people in the Senate when they look at this to

consider the member for Indi's very reasoned comments around the impact on rural and regional Australia.

In the time remaining, it is impossible to deal with all of the cuts. The bill itself is 387 pages long, the explanatory memorandum 271 pages. But I do want to turn my attention to two particular measures that the government has been trying on for years now. The changes to proportional payment to pensions outside Australia is a blatantly discriminatory measure. It unfairly targets a growing number of overseas born pensioners. My electorate in this place is one of only two in the parliament where a majority of people were born in another country. After six weeks outside the country, this bill would see the rate reduced, if you have lived here for less than 35 years, proportional to your Australian working-life residence.

About 190,000 pensioners are born overseas, and the government has to understand that ties to family and country of birth are not severed through grant of Australian citizenship. Those ties can strengthen us; they are not a fiscal burden to be punished. In terms of holidays, the habit of many pensioners is they save up for a big trip rather than taking lots of shorter ones, for reasons of family and care. And it makes sense, if you are counting your pennies, to use the flight and maximise your time away—you do not have to get back for work. Caring for family members overseas is also an important part of life. Funnily enough, people are often sick for longer than six weeks. It puts pensioners in a diabolical position when they have to make a choice between staying with a sick and dying relative and rushing back to Australia just so Centrelink will not cut off their pension when they may have worked here and paid tax for 32 years. COTA Australia, in their submission to the Senate inquiry into the 2015 version of the budget repair bill, said:

... this measure is excessively punitive and inequitable in its impact on Australians not born in this country and who maintain cultural and familial ties to their place of birth. As around 40 per cent of Age Pensioners were not born in Australia the impact of the measure is likely to be significant and unfairly borne by one segment of our community.

The other measure I want to draw attention to is the pensioner education supplement—or the removal thereof. Is it fourth or fifth time lucky for this one? The government has failed to listen so many times before. In the Minister for Social Services' second reading speech on last year's crack at this, he stated, of the pensioner education supplement and the education entry payment:

... they were ... introduced to assist long-term income support recipients who had been out of the workforce for a long period of time by helping them improve or rebuild skills to be more competitive in the labour market.

That is a clear opportunity for cuts, isn't it! The minister went on to justify their abolition, in part, by reference to the targeted support and assistance now available to these people—things like HECS loans, VET FEE-HELP and so on, which cover tuition, not additional expenses as you study, which means so much to low-income earners.

The *Poverty in Australia 2016* report by ACOSS said that, for the 13.3 per cent of Australians who are living in poverty:

Being unemployed is the strongest overall predictor of poverty ...

Indeed, more than 63 per cent of unemployed households were experiencing poverty. The second most vulnerable group after Newstart recipients are those in receipt of the parenting

payment, over 50 per cent of whom exist below the poverty line. Again in the minister's second reading speech on the 2016 bill, he noted:

The most common recipient of the pensioner education supplement is likely to be on a parenting payment (single) ...

And the people who receive the parenting payment single—let us call them, I don't know, women; 95 per cent of people who receive that payment are women—have the audacity to seek assistance to undertake study as a pathway to re-entering the workforce!

I was raised by a single mother. I have seen this up close. My mum was forced to leave school at year 11 because her family could not afford the uniform to go to a school where she could finish year 12. Then she was out of the workforce for many years, raising us. A few years after my dad died, she decided she had to fight her way back into the workforce. She thought, 'I know; I'll go and do a year 12 subject.' She actually topped the state adult VCE in psychology, and that gave her the encouragement to then go and do a nursing refresher course and eke out work. It is not easy. In effect, removing this payment means that single mums who go back to education will be forced to find those extra few dollars by taking things from their kids.

The Welfare Rights Centre, in its submission to the Senate inquiry into the budget repair bill 2015, stated:

The removal of this payment is both counter-productive and short-sighted, and calls into question the sincerity of the Government's stated aims of encouraging job seekers of working age to be 'job ready'.

It also said:

... even the ideologically-driven, fiscally hard-headed National Commission of Audit did not go as far as recommending that the PES be removed, proposing instead that the Supplement only be provided to recipients during study terms or semesters.

Those are just two of the cuts. I could go on, if time permitted—and I am sure my colleagues will. I urge the government to reconsider these cruel cuts, which are not necessary, in this legislation. (*Time expired*)

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Irons): I appreciate the member for Bruce's speech and I understand, as he said in his speech, that he is a new member of this place. He spoke about choices as well, and he might want to make choices in regards to some of the terms he inserts into his speeches which not only reflect on the parliament but reflect on him.

Mrs WICKS (Robertson) (17:04): I rise to support the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017 and the statements of members on this side of the House, who have been clear on how this government is backing families who need it most. This bill includes a number of items which are new as well as previously introduced social services measures which will improve the fairness and sustainability of government payments. But, above all, this legislation reconfirms how we are determined to make life easier for our hardworking families.

As the Minister for Social Services outlined in his second reading speech on this legislation, this bill reintroduces the Jobs for Families Child Care Package, from the Education and Training portfolio, and a range of other measures. Together, the measures in this bill will help us provide a fair and reasonable safety net for those who need it, encourage participation in work and study, and contribute to bringing the budget back to balance.

This government wants a welfare system that supports the most vulnerable in our community, encourages those capable of work or study to do so, reduces intergenerational welfare dependency and is sustainable for the future. But today I want to focus on our government's commitment, and continuing commitment, to investing in child care.

We will, with this bill, provide parents with more choice and opportunity to work, and provide children with high-quality early education. This is absolutely vital in my electorate on the Central Coast, where around one in four, or 30,000 people, leave home early in the morning and return home late at night to their families because the only jobs that are available for them are in Sydney or Newcastle. This is an everyday reality. My husband does it. As I said, around 30,000 hardworking people on the Central Coast do it.

It is certainly something that hits home whenever I meet with the young students who visit Parliament House in school groups, like I did during the last sitting wee. We were visited by some wonderful students from my old school, St Philip's Christian College at Gosford. The Prime Minister took the time to meet all the stage 3 students, who asked some fantastic questions, in his courtyard, and of course they took plenty of photos. As I do with every other school group, I asked every student present to raise their hand if their parents had to leave home early in the morning and return home late at night because their jobs are in Sydney or Newcastle. Around two-thirds of the students usually raise their hands, and it was certainly the case on this occasion as well. It really does demonstrate how widespread the need to support working families is. With this everyday requirement for parents to access child care so they can work, flexibility is crucial. Put simply, access to child care can mean the difference between working and not working, especially when your job is a four-hour round trip commute every day.

Of course, we have so many outstanding child care centres on the Central Coast in suburbs like Point Clare, Erina, Karingong and even just near my electorate office in West Gosford, with many hard-working, dedicated, caring and wonderful staff members. I do want to pay tribute to every single one of them and the childcare centres on the Central Coast. I have been the beneficiary as a mum with two kids and I know what an extraordinary job they do for the future generations.

I commend the Jobs for Families Child Care package because it delivers genuine, much-needed reform for a simpler, more affordable, more accessible and more flexible early education and childcare system. In supporting almost one million Australian families to balance work and parenting responsibilities, this package of measures is fair. It will provide the greatest number of hours of support in child care to the families who work the longest hours and the greatest financial support to the families who earn the least. In my electorate of Robertson, I am advised the latest figures reveal that almost 9,000 will receive an extra \$20 in family tax benefits per child per fortnight to help with their day-to-day costs of living.

But the significant investment in child care must be fiscally sustainable. Combining fair and reasonable changes to the family tax benefit system and childcare reforms into a single bill enables the government to reduce spending and increase workforce participation through an affordable childcare system. As part of this bill, the Child Care Subsidy will replace the current Child Care Benefit and Child Care Rebate with a single, means-tested subsidy from 2 July 2018. The package before the House will also provide targeted additional fee assistance

through a new Child Care Safety Net for vulnerable and disadvantaged children and provide consequential and transitional arrangements.

We are also introducing an activity test to ensure that the greatest number of subsidised hours is provided to those who work the most. The legislation also includes the introduction of an hourly fee subsidy cap to put downward pressure on fees charged by childcare providers; it strengthens approved childcare service eligibility requirements; and it enhances the childcare payments system compliance framework. Of course, it is right to ask the question: why is it tied to savings to pay for it? That is simply because we have a responsibility—not just for ourselves, but for future generations, for our children and our children's children—to ensure we do not see the nation's debt go up any further. As the Member for Fairfax said in this debate earlier today, it is in many ways squarely about budget repair.

This bill reinforces that this government is the party of lower taxes. It is a clear reminder that Labor is the party of higher taxes, bigger deficits and more debt. It is the same Labor Party that wants a new carbon tax, but cannot tell people how much it will be; the same Labor Party that wants to make the budget worse off by \$16.5 billion; and the same Labor Party, represented on the Central Coast by Senator Deborah O'Neill and others, that wants higher spending, higher taxes and fewer local jobs.

So in contrast to this reckless approach from Labor, this government is supporting families through measures such as those outlined in this bill. As the Minister for Education said, we do not want to see the very children who are in child care today lumbered with higher levels of government debt in the future than is already the case. We do not want to see higher levels of tax that will hurt job opportunities for those children coming through our educational system today. Sadly, far too many families are falling off the financial cliff mid-financial year when it comes to their child care support. Too many Central Coast families have run out of support for their childcare bills. This is a tragedy. We need to be giving children the best start in life. As a mother of two, I know this to be the case.

There are many other elements of this bill, but I rise today to again place on the record my determination to ensure this government delivers a core commitment—simpler, more affordable, more flexible and more accessible childcare system and something that will benefit the families of Robertson. I commend this bill to the House.

Ms SHARKIE (Mayo) (17:11): I cannot support the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017. It is very bad policy and it lumps in bad policy with good policy. The government has negotiated with us, the Nick Xenophon Team in good faith on individual pieces of legislation, but this bill does not reflect that good faith. I and the Nick Xenophon Team will always support sensible welfare reform and will continue to negotiate with the government from this position. However, we definitively reject many of the cuts contained within this bill. That is because they are too deep, too harsh and, most critically, they target the same vulnerable group of people again and again.

Most importantly, there is no evidence that the measures in this legislation will assist young people to find employment or assist single parents of older children to find employment or earn more money. They will do nothing to assist pensioners to keep lights on

in the home, and it will do nothing but cut financial assistance from some of the most vulnerable citizens.

The Nick Xenophon Team takes budget repair seriously. We know it is a necessary foundation for the future prosperity of our nation, but if heavy-lifting on budget repair is going to be successful, then all segments of Australian society need to tighten their belts, not just the poorest third.

I would like to talk about family tax benefits. For the life of me, I cannot understand why the government is determined to abandon Howard's battlers for whom family tax benefits were created. In the national broadsheet *The Australian* on 1 December 2015, former Prime Minister John Howard was quoted by Judith Sloane as saying that he did not 'regard family tax benefits as a form of welfare'. It is true that the original scope of the Family Tax Benefit scheme was relatively generous, and it is for this reason, perhaps not unreasonably, that some have labelled it as 'middle-class welfare'. However, the halcyon days of generous payments for middle-class families are well and truly over. Family tax benefits have been cut again and again, and what little remains now provides critical support for struggling families. Some people argue that governments do not have a role in subsidising families and that it should be completely up to families to bear the costs of any children they choose to have. However, you cannot ignore that, statistically, impoverished and disadvantaged children often beget more disadvantage. This is a cycle we cannot and should not actively choose to reinforce.

More importantly, times are changing. Families are more vulnerable than ever in this country. In ACOSS's 2016 report, *Poverty in Australia*, it is estimated that 730,000 Australian children are living in poverty. Everyone who looks at real estate pages sees how many more zeros there are in home prices—prices which more and more Australian families simply cannot afford. Even rental markets are increasingly tight, with more and more families in insecure housing and impermanent month-to-month leases. In light of this, the government's proposed cuts to family tax benefits are just too harsh. Of the 1.1 million families who will lose FTB A and FTB B supplements, over half are sole parents. A two-parent family with two children under 15 and a dual combined income of \$60,000 a year stands to lose just over \$400 a year in family tax benefits. A two-parent family with a single income of \$60,000 a year and two children under 15 will lose even more. They will lose \$756 a year. A single parent with an income of \$40,000 and a 17-year-old child in high school will a year lose a whopping \$3,387 a year. That is nearly 10 per cent of that family's income.

We as a party are willing to discuss with government the streamlining of supplements into fortnightly payments so that families are able to budget more effectively. However, we do not believe that families who are in the lowest incomes—those who are receiving the maximum amount of family tax benefit—should be worse off, and they most certainly would be. What do we want for that single-parent family on \$40,000 a year with a 17-year-old? We want that child to finish school, undertake further education and to give them the best chance possible of escaping the poverty trap. Why would we want to reduce that likelihood? A wise woman once said to me, and that woman is my mother: when money troubles come in the door, love goes out the window. I believe that the cuts in family tax benefits would increase rates of separation. Why would we want to do that? Why would we want to put more families in crisis?

I would like to move on to talk about childcare reform. The Nick Xenophon Team considers that the childcare reform measures within the bill to be important for families and for the childcare sector. They will see hundreds of thousands of Australian families better off and should see increased workforce participation as a result. The childcare sector is united in support of many of the measures contained within the bill and they have conveyed to me how important those reforms will be. However, the reforms are not perfect and I have some issues with how they will impact on low-income families.

I also have concerns about the Budget Based Funded services that are not mentioned in the new package. These include Indigenous services and remote services which differ in practice from a traditional childcare model, as well as mobile childcare services, which are particularly valuable and well regarded in regional areas. For many remote Indigenous communities, budget based childcare services operate in a different manner to other childcare services due to the fact that they cater directly to the community's needs. Many of these centres run youth programs for children, and, while they do not fit perfectly into the childcare funding model, the positive impact on their community is incredibly significant. Similarly, the mobile childcare services ensure that children and families in disadvantaged regional communities have access to high-quality children's services. These services are invaluable for those living outside of the cities for whom the closest permanent childcare centre may be hours away. I will be seeking assurances from the government that these services will continue to be funded under any new scheme. If the government is serious about childcare reform, it should bring it to the House as standalone legislation. These measures were introduced in the 2014 budget and three years later there has been no reform. The children who were born on budget day in 2014 are now unlikely to see the benefits of the long-promised new package. Let's remember that the government already has—and we, of course, support this measure—\$950 million in savings that it has already managed with reform to child-swapping arrangements and ensuring that it is cutting rorting out of childcare systems in family day care. A further \$250 million was announced by Minister Birmingham today in expected savings. That alone would pay for this childcare reform.

The government has had three years to bring in this measure and, year after year, at this time of the year, working families reaching their \$7,500 threshold are wondering how they will afford child care. The most recent MYEFO shows a reduction in the projected cost of the childcare package of almost \$1.29 billion, and yet the government is still insisting on a further \$4 billion worth of savings above and beyond the cost of childcare reform. A package such as this is an investment in the future of Australia. If the government's prediction of 240,000 more people entering the workforce as a result of this childcare package is true, then the benefit it brings far outweighs the cost of it, so we say, 'Bring it on and bring it on in a standalone way.' This reform should not be used as a bargaining chip with which to strip vital support away for the lowest income Australian households.

In relation to the energy supplements, the instability and high cost of power in South Australia is devastating households, business and employment in my state. Both state and federal governments are playing the blame game and we are yet to see workable solutions actually implemented. State and federal governments share responsibility for the problem and both state and national regulators have made major mistakes in recent months. It is becoming increasingly apparent that it is not only South Australia that is vulnerable to instability in our

energy grids. According to the Tariff-Tracking Project, average electricity prices have increased by more than 80 per cent across Australia since 2009. In South Australia, they have increased by more than 125 per cent over that period. Until the federal government makes some serious efforts to address Australia's energy prices and energy security, until they reform the national electricity market—and that does not mean swapping a piece of coal on the front bench; it means true reform—and until they increase competition and put downward pressure on electricity prices, the Nick Xenophon Team simply cannot support closing the energy supplement to new welfare recipients. Let's remember that by doing this we would also be creating a two-tier welfare system and discouraging people from taking on short-term work, because we know that if they manage to get a three- or four-month contract and were back on Newstart they would be living on less money than they originally had under the Newstart program.

I would like to touch on the four-week waiting period for young Australians. Many in this House would know that I have been particularly vocal about that issue over the several months that it has been in the parliament and certainly in the media. The Nick Xenophon Team cannot and will not support discriminatory waiting periods for income support based on the age of a recipient. Young Australians who are in need of real support from the government should not be treated any differently from older Australians who also need support. We are all in favour of young people being activated and getting into the workforce. However, if you are being starved out of a foxhole, how do you do this? You have no capacity to find a job. It costs money to look for work. We all know this.

And we know that youth homelessness is on the increase. According to Homelessness Australia, under-24-year-olds already account for a whopping 42 per cent of homeless people. That is 26,000 young people aged 12 to 25 who are homeless. And 70 per cent of those young people left home to escape family violence and child abuse. It is just a ridiculous policy measure to think that, by starving a young person for four weeks, we would somehow magically assist them in finding a job. There is just no evidence that the long waiting periods will create any new jobs, or that they are going to get young people into work. So, just as we would not support discriminatory waiting periods for older Australians to receive the aged pension, we do not support the four-week waiting period for Australians under 25 to receive income support payments.

Similarly, we cannot support discrimination against young people by preventing them from accessing Newstart until they are 25. Many of them are already parents of five-, six- and seven-year-olds by this stage. Young independent jobseekers deserve the same level of financial support afforded to older jobseekers. The cost of looking for a job—and of public transport, phone calls, internet, work clothes, printing and job training—is not magically cheaper just because you are under the age of 25. Water, rent, electricity—they are no cheaper for independent Australians who are 25, 35 or 50.

The Nick Xenophon Team deliberated long and hard on the issue of paid parental leave. We had hoped to navigate a course that would extend the number of weeks available to lower income primary caregivers, but without deeply cutting those who fought hard for the benefits afforded to them by their employer-funded paid parental leave schemes. We just could not make it through with the government, despite many, many hours—many days—of negotiation.

Besides the United States, Australia has the least generous government-supported paid parental leave system in the OECD. Paid parental leave is not just another welfare payment; it is an employment benefit, and the investment in it is an investment in Australia's children.

There is a deep concern that the government's paid parental leave scheme will ultimately shift the full responsibility for paid parental leave in Australia onto the government. The government's proposal of 'topping up' paid parental leave provided by employers only serves to destroy the incentive for employers to provide parental leave in the first place. We were told this by employers firsthand. They have said to us: why would they bother providing their employees with any weeks of paid leave if the government is just going to top it up to 18 weeks or 20 weeks anyway? Better to compensate their employees in other ways, such as return-to-work bonuses.

The government's proposal will inevitably shift the responsibility and cost for paid parental leave from a shared public-private concern to a wholly-funded government concern. And, although the government will save money in the short run, we are deeply concerned that the government is actually creating a future unfunded liability as employers respond to the new incentives and just stop paying parental leave as a workplace prerogative altogether. This policy position is in complete contrast to the government's position of small government.

In conclusion, I and the Nick Xenophon Team will continue to deliberate carefully on all proposals the government puts forward on the measures contained within this bill. But, as it stands, we cannot support the omnibus bill, and we most certainly cannot support cuts to our most vulnerable Australians.

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (17:26): I rise to speak in favour of the amendment that has been proposed, because it highlights the true nature of this government. On a day when the government and the Prime Minister refused to support a suspension of standing orders so we could debate legislation which would protect the income of hundreds of thousands of low-paid workers, we are now debating a bill which sees this government also cut many of the support payments for those same workers. And that is the thing about this government: they are very quick to put forward tax cuts for themselves and tax cuts for the top end of town, and very quick to, with a lot of fanfare, talk about the \$50 billion tax cut to big business, in particular—money that will go overseas to multinationals and money that will go back to the big banks. At the same time, they are also very quick to continue to attack some of our lowest-paid workers and families trying to survive on the smallest of incomes.

So, when I rise to give this speech on the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017, it is not just about the fact that these workers—particularly in retail, pharmacy and hospitality—will have their penalty rates on Sundays cut, which will cost some of these workers \$2,000 a year, though for some could be even more. These are the same workers who, if they have children, will get hit by this government if this bill gets passed with cuts to their family tax benefit.

And, just in case the government thinks I am making this up, I will just share the story of a local woman in my electorate, a single mum. She will be hit if this bill is passed because her youngest is now 18. She still runs her daughter around to school. Her daughter does not yet have her licence. Her daughter is involved in a NETschool program and has re-engaged in education, so this is a family that has had its challenges. Mum tries to work two casual part-time jobs, and then has some support from Centrelink in terms of family tax benefits, as well

as some Centrelink payments, just to try and scrape by. She is dependent upon how busy the store is and whether people are sick, so she might get 30 hours one week and then 10 hours the next week, so her income does fluctuate. She is trying to do everything she can. She is a single mum trying to work two jobs, hoping that they would make a full-time job, and then, with family tax benefit, is just scraping by. Christmas is hard. Returning to school is hard. Helping her daughter with driving lessons is hard and expensive. Yet everything that this government has done today is to not help this single mum and her children survive. Everything that this government has done today is to attack her, on the small income that she has.

So let us just remind ourselves of that. These are people who are earning less than, in some cases, \$30,000 a year. They did not benefit from the government's tax cuts to high-income earners; those, in parts of my electorate, went to a very small proportion of people. Instead, the government choose to attack people like this family.

And it is not just this family that I choose to highlight; it is families like Beck Kelly's. Beck Kelly is an advocate in our community who, day in, day out, supports families of children with autism. She volunteers a lot of her own time. She is studying and she is working part-time. Her husband is also working part-time and taking care of their two young children who have autism. The cuts to family tax benefit means that Beck might have to give up study to work full-time or they will have to try to find someone to care for the children so that her husband could return to work full-time. They are the kinds of pressures that this government is putting on families—families who are trying to survive on the smallest of incomes.

I also think of the Martins in speaking to this bill. The Martins are on what is the average income in the Bendigo electorate—just under \$50,000. They have three children. One of them is in high school and two of them are in primary school. They are surviving. They are what the government would term 'a hardworking family'. Yet this government wants to change the family tax benefit for this kind of family, which would see them worse off.

In rising to speak about this bill, I also think of little Paige, who I first met when she was in year 1 and homeless. She was at the Saltworks dinner with her mum. Her mum was pregnant and they were desperate to try to find accommodation. Mum was looking for work. At the age that she was, she was struggling to find work—pregnant, homeless and looking for support. She is what you might coin 'vulnerable', but she would not coin herself as 'vulnerable'; she would say that she is just trying to get by. Yet she is a mum that this government would seek to target. This government clearly have a problem with working families. They clearly have a problem with families, whether they be low- or middle-income families. You can see that by the cuts that they have proposed in this package—for example, the cuts to paid parental leave, denying new mums time with their families.

Perhaps the government need a bit of a lesson on how collective bargaining works, because they seem to really struggle to understand collective bargaining. We have a minimum award. It is an absolute minimum, which is why people get so upset when there is a random cut to the minimum, as we have seen with penalty rates. Employees, most of the time with their elected union representatives, will bargain for above the award rate and will secure a change in conditions and an improvement in conditions above the award minimum. A number of the industries that we have focused on today—like pharmacy and retail—have been able to secure, through collective bargaining, top-ups in paid maternity leave. It is similar in our

Public Service. Through years of enterprise bargaining they have been able to secure extra paid parental leave. But now the government seek to punish those workers and those employers who did the right thing about prioritising conditions for new mums and new families in terms of paid maternity and paternity leave.

In this bill they are also targeting young jobseekers, people who may have finished their university degree and are starting to look for work. They want to make them starve, essentially, for five weeks until they are able to claim Newstart. It is just ridiculous to say to university students, who may have finished their degree, who still have to pay their rent—who may have had to leave home and are living in an electorate like Bendigo, where we have a university—and who no longer qualify for the university study allowance, because they are no longer studying, 'Because you are on Newstart, you have to wait five weeks.' It is just forcing people into dire poverty. It is okay if you have rich parents to fall back on. But the vast majority of young people in Australia do not have rich parents to fall back on. The government's answer for young people seems to be, 'If you want a home, have rich parents,' or 'If you finish university, move back home and live off your parents before you start your job.' That is not how the majority of young Australians live. It is also completely disempowering to force young people back home so that family members can support them for five weeks until they qualify. This government has the most negative and cynical approach to this.

And all of these cuts are savings. Previous speakers from my side of the House have highlighted that these changes that are before us are actually a \$2.7 billion saving. The government are cutting \$2.7 billion out of the pockets of low- to middle-income Australian families, single parents, young people and pensioners. They are cutting money out of their pockets. This is a savings bill—and, in a cynical way, they have tried to link it to changes to child care.

Labor has, for a long time, supported greater investment in early childhood education. It was Labor that introduced the national quality framework to ensure that we had a framework for education and care for our youngest Australians. It was Labor that introduced and ensured that there were ratios—so you had the right number of educators to young children from babies through to five. It was Labor that first acknowledged that we have gone from child care and a workforce participation sector to early childhood education. I am really concerned at the government's changes to the activity test. I am concerned that some of the most vulnerable children in parts of my electorate will miss out on hours of early childhood education. They need every single hour they can get.

I think of a young man named Lestat whom I met at Golden Square Goodstart. He is there five days a week. Goodstart are very good in that they do not chase the fees. His family are in tens of thousands of dollars in debt for fees they have not paid. The educators know how critical it is for Lestat to come to their education facility every single day. This childcare facility taught Lestat and his brothers everything from toilet training in their early years to their letters and their colours—because they simply do not come from a stable home with parents capable of doing that. The activity test will exclude vulnerable children—the children who most need to be engaged in early childhood education.

I also have a fear—and the government has not addressed this in any way—that, if vulnerable children whose parents may not be fully engaged in work or study are excluded from child care because they have had their hours cut, that will put pressure on centres to

close rooms for certain days. I fear that, in areas of low income and high unemployment, where we are desperately trying to break the cycle of poverty through the next generation, numbers will drop because families get fewer hours allocated to them. That will mean fewer children going to child care and early childhood education each and every day, which could place pressure on some childcare centres to close rooms on certain days. That would then put pressure on families who want their children in care because of work to turn around and say to their employers, 'I can't come to work on Mondays because the centre doesn't open on Mondays.' A childcare model that is designed for the inner cities does not work in regional areas. The government has not put enough focus in its childcare package on regional cities and electorates and areas where the most vulnerable are accessing early childhood education. It has not put enough focus on mobile childcare and education facilities, which are most in need in the bush.

To outline a few of the other cuts contained in the bill to demonstrate how much the government are seeking to save, they are stopping the payment of the pension support supplement after six weeks when our pensioners are overseas. Do they know how this washes with people in their electorates? Perhaps they are just not listening to pensioners in these electorates. We live in a multicultural society and a multicultural world today. Even in my electorate, which has one of the smallest proportions of people born overseas living in it, there are still lots of grandmas who travel overseas to spend three months of the year with their grandchildren and then come home—because guess what? They cannot afford to fly back and forth every five weeks. This measure targets a lot of pensioners living all over Australia, including those in regional areas. This is another budget savings measure. The pensioner education supplement is being abolished—because why would pensioners want to keep studying? This is another cruel measure, excluding pensioners from education by taking this money out of their pockets.

The government are also seeking to close the energy supplement for new welfare recipients. They are trying to suggest that energy has all of a sudden got cheaper, when all of their rhetoric says otherwise. The energy market at a national level is failing. It has emerged that, during the really hot few weeks that we had in February, the national Energy Regulator was going to shut off electricity to my home town of Bendigo so that coal focused New South Wales could keep their lights on. There is a problem with the energy market and there is a problem with the Australian Energy Regulator, but the government blame renewables. Worse still, they are cutting the supplements that help people pay those bills.

This is a cruel bill; it is a cynical bill; it is a savings bill. It is linked to changes to child care and early childhood education, but those changes demonstrate how the government have not moved with the times. They do not acknowledge the importance of early childhood education for every child, regardless of their parents' income. I urge the government to drop this bill or to support Labor's amendment.

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (17:41): I rise to speak on the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017. We have heard from many speakers on this side of the zombie measures that are contained in this bill—measures from that dreadful budget back in 2014 that are now, seemingly, linked to whether or not this government will support increases in funding to child care. I actually do not want to talk about the zombie measures today. In fact, I think it is quite sad, really, that we are not having

a discussion today specifically about child care. The fact that the government has linked these measures means that we have so much to say and so many people in our communities to defend that we are, quite rightly, concentrating on those areas. Many people on this side have already done so, but today I want to have the conversation that we should be having, which is specifically about child care.

I have often quite openly said to people in my community that, if as a government you had to pick one thing to make a difference in 2050, it would be educating zero-to-five-year-olds. Children who are born today will be in their mid-30s in 2050, and whether or not they are able to manage a world that is growing now will depend entirely on whether or not they are given every possible advantage in their first five years of life. Ninety per cent of the development of a child's brain occurs in the first five years of life, and, if you get that wrong, 12 years of schooling does not make up for it. It is incredibly important. On this side of the House, we see child care being not just about workforce participation but about what benefits the child. I believe in this childcare package this government has got the balance wrong. I would like to be in here having a debate about that and having community consultation about it so that we can adjust the balance between what a working family needs now and what the community will need in the mid- to long term. They are the two aspects of child care: whether we are providing it so that more women can join the workforce, which is incredibly important, and families can manage their work and family life balance better now, which is also incredibly important; or providing it to ensure that our children have the best possible opportunity to grow up and flourish.

All of the research shows that, if you are going to invest in the zero-to-fives in any section of the community, the investment has the biggest return for the community as a whole and for the person when it is directed towards those children who are most vulnerable—children whose parents do not have the skills or may have intellectual disabilities, drug and alcohol problems or other issues that prevent them from being the best parents they can be. We know that, if you put the effort into those children, the impact on them is phenomenal and the return to the taxpayer in the long term is also incredible. In fact, a PricewaterhouseCoopers report in 2014 found that the long-term gains in productivity from children who participate in quality child care are even greater than the gains from increased workforce participation by their parents. When looking at children in disadvantaged families who were receiving no formal early childhood education, it was shown that engaging them in early childhood education and care would boost Australia's GDP by a further \$13.3 billion by 2050.

So there are very good economic reasons to invest in the early education of the most vulnerable children in our community, and there are also, of course, reasons to do that for the benefit of the children themselves. Yet this childcare package actually takes support from the most vulnerable in our community. It lessens the assistance for families that are really struggling with raising their children and earning a living, with the lack of flexibility that families quite often have. This package actually takes from them.

I want to walk through how it does that, because this is an extraordinarily complex piece of work. The government claims that this simplifies child care. It actually does not. It is incredibly complex, and nearly every stakeholder that is worth listening to when it comes to early childhood education says exactly that.

Currently, the childcare-benefit activity test gives families 48 hours, or four days, of subsidised care per fortnight without undertaking any activity. That means that any child, whether the parents work or not, can have two days per week, because that is considered to be the amount that you need for a child to bond with the other children and the early childhood educators and to feel stable. That is what a child needs: two days per week. And that is what the current activity test gives. It gives 100 hours of subsidised care per fortnight if both parents undertake activity of more than 30 hours per fortnight. It is a bit complex, but essentially it guarantees two days to every child.

Under the new activity test, families will receive 36 hours per fortnight when both parents undertake activities for eight to 16 hours per fortnight. That is the first tier. In the second tier, it provides double that if parents work from 16 to 48 hours per fortnight, and it provides 100 hours if parents work 48 hours plus per fortnight. There are three separate tiers.

A person, for example, who has casual work—and I will just stop for a minute there when I mention casual work and say that this activity test is really quite good if you are in permanent work and you sit a few thousand dollars on one side or the other of the tier so that you know you are going to be in that tier for the full year. If your work is stable and nothing happens in the year, this could be quite good for you. But an increasing number of people in our communities, not just in regional areas but in city areas as well, do not have the luxury of permanent full-time work or even permanent part-time work. Their work is quite sporadic. It is quite casual.

I have doorknocked areas of my electorate where I have found children who were eight or nine years of age at home on their own. They came to the door and unlocked the door in some cases, which worried me greatly, even more than seeing them home alone. When I phoned their parents later, I found parents who were finding out at eight in the morning whether they were working that day. These were not parents who had the ability to say no because they could not get child care for their children.

We have people in our communities who live very sporadic lives. They do not know when they are going to work. They take the work when they can. They do not have the flexibility of going in and out of child care. In order to be able to take the work, they have to take the days of child care because, if they give those days up, they cannot get their children back in. Those two days of child care that were available under the old system allowed parents to say to an employer: 'I can work Thursday, Friday, Saturday and Sunday. On Thursday and Friday I can put my children into child care, and on Saturday and Sunday my partner can look after the kids while I go to work.' They were able to organise their days because of that.

Now, that certainty of those two days is gone. The fallback position for parents who do not meet the activity test is 12 hours. Now, 12 hours is not two days; it is one, because long-day centres are open for 10 hours. That is it. They are open for 10 hours, and, if you do not take them for 10 hours, another parent will. So that is one day. That is not sufficient for parents who work those unstable kinds of work patterns to organise their lives, and it is not enough for a child to bond and feel secure and develop a pattern with the carers and the other children, so it is actually not good for anybody, but that is what we have got at the moment.

I want you to consider too what it means for a parent who sits somewhere in the middle, someone who works 16 hours a fortnight, so they are entitled to 36 hours per fortnight, or, even better, they work 18 hours per fortnight, and it has been fairly stable, so they are entitled

to 72 hours per fortnight, and then something happens. Their partner gets sick, or their child gets sick; they have to take a few weeks off, and suddenly they fall into the lower tier. What if that happens towards the end of the year? What kind of debt do you have if you have been claiming 72 hours per fortnight quite legitimately and then something happens in your life that changes, and suddenly you are only entitled to 36 hours per fortnight? You get one of those robo-debts and it is real, not because of any fault of your own but because your working life was not stable enough to work within these artificial tiers that this government has created for parents to work in.

It is 36 hours of child care for eight to 16 hours per fortnight; 72 hours for 16 to 48 hours; and 100 hours per fortnight when both parents undertake activities for 48 hours per fortnight or more. That is quite confusing, but then you add the extra layer of how much you earn in those hours. If you earn up to \$65,710 per family, you get a subsidy rate of 85 per cent. If you earn from \$65,000 to about \$170,000, it tapers down. Over \$170,000 and up to \$250,000, it is a 50 per cent subsidy rate. Again, it is good to taper, and the government here, you can see, is trying to reduce the subsidy to those who earn more. It has moved the subsidy into those with stable employment in the middle range, and that is not a bad thing.

But just consider if you are a parent trying to return to work. You are not working at the moment, but you are seeking work. Someone offers you two days work this week on short notice, and you cannot get child care. Of course you cannot get child care. Parents who are trying to return to work hit their head up against this barrier that they actually have to be working in order to get the childcare subsidy, and they cannot work unless they have the child care. If a parent is in that sort of situation for two weeks, they might manage to find a way around it if they are suddenly offered permanent part-time work. But, if they are in and out through casual work for several months while they try to work their way back into the workforce, how does this help them do that at all?

This system is actually a barrier for them, not an aid. That is the discussion we should be having here. If this is actually about workforce participation, it is only actually helping those who already have secure, permanent patterns of work. It is a barrier to anybody trying to move into the workforce and it is a barrier for those many people who work in the casual world, where the work comes and goes around work patterns that they do not have control over.

You can imagine what happens if you are claiming the 85 per cent subsidy, so as a family you are getting \$63,000 or whatever a year, and then something happens that pushes you into another taper rate. Your partner gets extra work and earns an extra \$20,000 a year, then suddenly you are not entitled to the 85 per cent and you are only entitled to 65 per cent. You have got a debt because you did the right thing. This is a ridiculous system. This does not recognise in any way the world we live in today. It does not recognise at all the world we live in today.

Every stakeholder who is worth talking to has said exactly that. This is the Social Policy Research Centre from the University of New South Wales:

There are no measures in the package that will make LDC (long day care) more flexible – indeed, many of the new rules ... will make it more rigid.

... ..

... the new, three-tiered activity test introduces a level of complexity never seen before in the Australian childcare system.

... ..

... the Bill introduces provisions that will increase the complexity and reduce accessibility and affordability for some of the most vulnerable children and families.

This is where I go back to my first point: parents who are in this precarious situation are already incredibly stressed as families. They already are the parents who have got so much else on their minds that it becomes difficult to pay attention to their children in the way that you need to if you want your child to reach the age of two with all of their needs met, which is incidentally what you need to do if you want your child to be highly creative. They need to reach that level of two assuming that whatever they need is just going to be there so that they can explore and be creative as adults. It is done by the time they are two. It is all over.

Parents who are in this kind of precarious situation, where they do not know where their next hours of work are coming from, have trouble finding time for the family to be together because their work lives are moving around. Even deciding to have breakfast together on Wednesday becomes difficult. Those parents need to have the support that stable, good quality early education gives them and their children. This bill takes it from them. They have it now; if this bill passes, it will be not just the zombie measures but also the childcare package that actually hit the most vulnerable in our community.

I believe the hearts of those on the other side are in the right place; I really do believe that they are trying to improve the childcare system, but they just have not. Please, separate it out: take the zombie measures out and let us have a real debate about what is best for children and what is best for our community in terms of the capacity of our children to grow up and be productive, creative and well-balanced adults. That is our job in this place: to consider both sides of the coin and get it right so that when these children turned out to be adults, they can build a better society for themselves.

Ms KEAY (Braddon) (17:56): I would like to thank the member for Parramatta for giving a very detailed account of these changes that will have an impact on the childcare system of this country. As a parent who has used child care continuously over the last 10 years, I know some of the issues that the member for Parramatta raised would be of significant concern for families if the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017 is to be passed. I also agree with the member for Parramatta in her contribution that, particularly around child care, we need to see more debate, more investigation and more attention just on this one part of this omnibus bill.

When I first read this bill, I said to myself, 'Wow, I know it is an omnibus bill, but goodness me there are so many measures in here that will have such a detrimental impact on so many Australians.' It is a real shame that we have a government that only talks about those who will benefit from this bill. Let us talk about those who will not benefit from this bill. These are some of the most vulnerable people in our community. I know that this legislation will have a devastating impact on the people in my community—the people of Braddon—in an electorate where we have poor health outcomes; we have relatively high unemployment, particularly in youth unemployment; and we also have very low educational attainment rates. This bill will hit those people the hardest. It makes me very sad to stand here in this place today and talk about what this bill will do for them. It will be devastating.

When you are talking about regional communities, they generally are older, they generally earn less and they generally do have a greater reliance on government support. All I have seen since being elected to this place, in a relatively short amount of time, is this constant attack from this government on those people. What I really struggle to understand is those sitting on the opposite side, those members of the National Party: when they can go back to their electorates, can they go back and look those families, those young people and those pensioners in the eye and say that this bill is good for them? The National Party are heroes at home but are cowards when it comes to being in Canberra.

Last week, I spoke about how regional inequality is becoming more entrenched in Australia. The gap of inequality between those in urban areas and those in regional areas, like in my electorate, has never been this big in the last 75 years. That gap is widening every day. This legislation will further entrench that inequality. It will affect families, working mums, pensioners and young people. It contains a deterrent for young people to find work. In some sort of sick game, the previously bipartisan approach to the NDIS has now been abandoned. Again, that is a terrible, terrible shame. This is so that the government can fund a \$50 billion tax cut to big business. It makes me question the government's priorities. When I come into this place, I look at my community and see what priorities they need: access to good health, access to good education, jobs, fair wage for the work that they do and support from a government that cares. I really do not think that this government is living up to any of that.

The Murdoch press and those opposite say that this side is engaging in the politics of envy, but this is the politics of reality. The reality is that we live in regional areas. The reality is that every dollar we have we have to spend on something that enables us to live day in, day out. It is the reality of what it means simply to get by. This is what I am faced with every day in my electorate when I go out knocking on the doors. I hear stories of people struggling to make ends meet every single day.

But I am particularly really disappointed that those opposite and especially those members from regional electorates, by supporting this bill, are not standing up for the people that they represent. They sit mutely and are prepared to green flag these cruel, heartless, out-of-touch cuts. Even more bizarrely, they are being stitched up by their own coalition colleagues on One Nation preferences, and still they do nothing. So tell the Prime Minister that you have had enough, that you are sick and tired of being taken for granted, and join this side of the House when it comes to the inevitable decision on this legislation. Just for once, those in the National Party, be a hero at home and a hero in Canberra.

I do not begrudge those families from Eastern Sydney, Toorak or the North Shore. I do not doubt many have worked hard to enjoy the quality of life that they do, but I do begrudge it when the local members seek to punish families in electorates like mine that are not so fortunate. The government admits that their family payment cuts will leave 1.5 million Australian families worse off, but what do these cuts to family tax benefits mean to the people of my electorate of Braddon on the north-west and west coasts of Tasmania? Around 8,000 families in Braddon who receive the family tax benefit part A will be affected by these cuts. As a result of the abolition of the family tax benefit part B end-of-year supplement, 6,335 families will lose \$354.

It is one of those things where families who receive this supplement plan their budget accordingly. It may be to buy their kids school uniforms. It may be to help pay some of the

bills. On the day that this omnibus bill came out into the media—on that very morning—I received an email, a real dose of reality that I would like to read into *Hansard*. This is from Melinda in my electorate:

Dear Justine

In regards to the LNP government proposal to remove family tax benefit B to single parents once youngest turned 13 and cuts to the reconciliation payments for Family Tax Benefit A & B (these historically were never bonuses).

This topic hits close to home!!

I am a single mum with 100% care of my son who has just turned 12.

I returned to part time work when—

he—

was 6 months old and I am still working!

I don't rent my home, I have a mortgage!

Here is someone that actually has a mortgage and is going to be so hard hit by these cuts. It makes me wonder if they are ever going to be able to service that mortgage. It continues:

I struggle everyday with making ends meet.

I don't drink or smoke or really have a social life - my money goes on the mortgage, power/phone/water and food.

Going back to school this year has been extremely hard financially without the back to school bonus.

Please don't let them take the FTB away from us too, I rely on that money to pay my rego and assist with rates.

Please Justine - please stick up for those of us doing our best for our kids!

That is such a heartfelt letter from someone who just that morning heard the news that these changes were going to happen and are going to hit her in that way. These are the real-life examples that I think every single one of us in this place need to listen to, need to respond to, need to react to and not pass this bill.

Labor will stand up for Melinda and so many other families. I challenge the Prime Minister or a Tasmanian Liberal senator to go visit Melinda, to knock on her door and explain why she should take this cut to fund a corporate tax handout. I think they would be lucky to get past the front gate.

The Prime Minister's plan to punish low-income working families does not just stop with them. Pensioners, people with disabilities, carers and Newstart recipients will be hit with the abolition of the energy supplement. I have heard some members on the other side say, 'Oh, with the carbon tax gone, the energy supplement should go.' When you come from a state that has the highest electricity bill in the country, that extra payment helps pay for a bill like that. It helps pay for the rates. It helps pay for the water and sewerage. And yet we are going to see pensioners and people on these payments worse off because they will not have that money. Some people might think, 'Oh, that's not a lot of money,' but it makes a hell of a difference to these people.

My electorate has one of the oldest populations in Australia. They have already expressed their disgust at the Prime Minister's plan to have them work until they drop at 70. Instead of

supporting them in their retirement, this Prime Minister wants to punish them. This government wants to create a two-tier system of pensioners.

Like a bad dream, there are more of those struggling in the community. This government wants young jobseekers to live on nothing for five weeks. Youth unemployment is also disproportionately high in regions, so once again it will be people living outside of the cities who suffer. Once again the National Party and regional Liberal Party members are happy to let down young people in their communities. Labor has opposed this overly harsh measure before and we will again.

The government always talks about young people and those on benefits needing to study or work, but the Prime Minister, aided and abetted by the National Party, wants to remove the pensioner education supplement and education entry payment, a small payment that goes some way to supporting people on income support who are trying to get ahead. It just goes to show how out of touch and mean-spirited these people are. But the most extraordinary, callous, cruel thing this government is doing is tying the funding of the NDIS to these cuts, playing off one vulnerable group of Australians against another.

I would just like to read a small snippet that was in *The Examiner* newspaper. TasCOSS chief executive, Kim Goodes, said:

"We're seeing ... a federal government that appears to want to attack people who are on welfare," Ms Goodes said.

She said TasCOSS was "appalled" that the Coalition was allegedly implying the NDIS would experience a funding shortfall if the omnibus bill was not passed.

TasCOSS is an organisation that is there to advocate on behalf of those who are vulnerable in our community, the less fortunate, and they were absolutely disgusted with what this government is attempting to achieve.

Rather than me talking further on this, I would like a mum from my electorate, Lyn, to talk about what the NDIS means to her family and her son, Mitchell. In her own words, Lyn has summed up why tying this bill to the NDIS is so wrong:

From the moment they placed Mitchell on my stomach I had this gut feeling that something was so wrong. I just didn't know what or how, but I just knew.

After 3 and half years Mitchell was referred to a Paediatrician and then to a geneticist, and on the 17th November 1998 he was diagnosed with a rare syndrome, Called Floating Harbor Syndrome.

Our Paediatrician told us that Mitchell was the 12th in the world to be diagnosed.

Because to get help it was like we weren't entitled to any, being told 'we don't have the funds' to 'he isn't that bad'.

I just kept my ear to the ground and was hopeful that another piece of legislation like Medicare was coming to help people.

Well Mitchell got a letter saying we had an appointment with a NDIS Coordinator, we could not wipe the smile off our face we were so excited.

What is that when you have a child with a disability?

We never had a life; we never had support apart from my Mum who died 17 years ago.

You so called politicians who make up the so called government who I didn't vote for because you treat us people like we as dirt and wouldn't give us the time of day and who guaranteed that Medicare and the NDIS won't be touched.

You tell us to live within our means, well how do I tell our sons and daughters who have a disability to do that, you can't can you?

Let me help you Prime Minister - don't give the multi millionaire's a tax cut of 50 billion dollars, tell them to live within their means.

I can't afford a trip to Canberra but I would love to have my say to you and the government.

How cruel you lot are to begrudge the most vulnerable some tax payer dollars to make a little bit happier for them.

Think with your heart.

It won't kill you.

Mr Speaker, need I say any more.

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (18:10): I too rise to speak emphatically against the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017, just as the member for Braddon did and just as other members on this side do. I do so because this bill will hurt families, mums and dads, pensioners and young people across Australia, and especially in my electorate of Hindmarsh. I say that, because the electorate of Hindmarsh has one of the oldest demographics in the nation, with one of the largest numbers of age pensioners in the nation. All these people are in the firing line as a result of this federal coalition government's latest proposed round of cuts.

This will entrench inequality in Australia. This particular bill will make the gap that exists between the haves and the have-nots even greater. Instead of giving people a leg up to assist them, to ensure that they keep up with the pace of increasing bills—getting a little bit ahead, paying their bills—this bill will ensure that that gap becomes greater and they fall further behind.

Inequality in Australia is at a 75-year high. It has not been higher than this for 75 years. In other words, we are back where we were 75 years ago when it comes to people that have and people that have not, and that is very sad. At this particular point in time, with a 75-year high of inequality in Australia, at a time like this, we should be addressing inequality; we should be looking, as I said, to give people a leg up, to assist them to keep up with the pace of increased costs, to keep them in line with CPI. We should be ensuring that the little bit of subsidies that we do give to the most vulnerable people—we are not talking about people who are millionaires or people who are doing quite well; we are talking about some of the most vulnerable people in our electorates and in this nation. We should be doing all we can to address that inequality and to assist them at this particular time.

The coalition government seems intent on increasing the gulf, bit by bit, by dismantling the safety nets that we have in place and the social security net, and this is what this bill does. For that, I think the government is extremely out of touch. You cannot get more out of touch than taking away from our poorest people, people who depend on the very small subsidies that they receive.

This omnibus bill will do nothing other than grow the gulf between rich and poor in this nation. Since the omnibus bill was first announced, in 2015, the government has said that they would not pass their child-care package unless cuts to family payments were first passed by the parliament. That is playing one particular group off against another, and it is extremely

cruel. Essentially, they are holding families with young children to ransom. This is a government that just will not listen.

The majority of savings measures in the bill have been previously introduced, but have not passed the parliament, most dating back to the 2014 budget, and we have all heard about the zombie measures. This government keeps resurrecting these cuts in different ways, threatening in different ways. And every time that they are resurrected, they are threatening again the most vulnerable people in our society. They just do not get it. Back in 2016 the government lost so many seats—they nearly lost the election—and they still have not got the measure that people see these cuts as very unfair. Australians do not want these unfair cuts, neither do I and neither do those on this side of the House. I am proud that Labor will continue to oppose them.

For years now this government has failed to deliver any childcare relief, because they insist on linking the changes to the cruel cuts to family budgets. With the introduction of this bill, the government is not just holding families to ransom to pay for child care, but now they are also adding pensioners, young Australians and new mums and dads. This bill introduces \$2.7 billion worth of cuts to family payments alone. They say they need to do this in order to pay for the \$1.6 billion childcare package. It does not make sense; they are robbing Peter to pay Paul. That is what this is. In total, it rips \$5.6 billion from the household budgets of low-income Australians who desperately need that money to pay their bills, buy clothes for their kids, put food on the table and send their kids to school. We will not support this bill.

Let's take a closer look at how this bill will hurt hardworking Australians—for example, pensioners who receive the energy supplement. The government wants to remove that energy supplement from the most vulnerable Australians: our pensioners, people with disability, carers and Newstart recipients. These are not people who are wealthy. These are not people who are doing it easy. These are people who are doing it quite tough. This cut will rip approximately \$550 from the pockets of pensioner couples, and \$229 from a single Newstart recipient already struggling on a very inadequate payment. What happens when you rip \$229 from someone who is just making ends meet and, in some cases, not making ends meet but being basically dependent on different welfare agencies, on top of all this?

The reality is that this government has been in since 2013 and there has been no job growth. I could understand that, if there were plenty of jobs and they were creating wonderful opportunities for young people, then, yes, you would certainly look at these things. But the economy is not doing well, and we have seen a decline in job growth, so it is the worst time to put these cuts in.

The other cuts are to migrant pensioners. Pensioners are being targeted in other ways apart from the cuts. If this government gets its way, after six weeks overseas, pensioners born overseas will have the rate of their pension reduced. This will unfairly punish people who choose to spend a period of time overseas visiting family. I know that in my electorate many aged pensioners of migrant background decide to visit their country of birth to see relatives for a few weeks or maybe a month or two or just to spend the warmer season during our winter over there—just as many people move to Queensland in winter; it is no different. Yet they will be punished for wanting to go overseas to visit family.

These are people who maybe have saved their whole lives just to visit their homeland. They will be punished and only allowed to be there for six weeks. Currently, pensioners can

stay overseas for 26 weeks and receive their full pension. Following that time, the pension is reduced to a rate that depends on the number of years they have resided in Australia. It could be someone who has been saving their entire life to go for a holiday to the homeland where they were born to see relatives for the very last time and spend maybe two or three months overseas. But these cuts mean that after just six weeks these people will be affected and they will only be allowed to stay for six weeks.

These people who will have the rate of their pension cut have lived in Australia for less than 35 years. It is estimated that this particular measure will affect around 190,000 pensioners who came here as migrants many years ago. This will affect many pensioners in my electorate, and many have raised it already with me and are concerned about this particular measure. They are good people—people who worked, people who paid their taxes—who now, in their twilight years, wish to go and spend perhaps a few weeks in winter over in sunny Europe in the Mediterranean, perhaps, given the Deputy Speaker's background, in Italy or Greece or many other countries, and rightly so. It is their right to be able to do that, just like it is the right of any other retiree who wishes to go to the northern part of Australia for winter.

We are discriminating in a big way here, and I find this very wrong. Certainly I am hearing the message loud and clear in my electorate from the 190,000 people affected by this, and many other electorates around the country would be hearing the same things that I am hearing. Coupled with the changes to the asset test, this could result in many pensioners really struggling to make ends meet. People who have worked hard all their lives deserve dignity in their retirement. The last thing they need is to be treated like a burden on society by this particular government, the coalition government, and by the Treasurer. This is terrible. These people need to be treated with dignity.

The other area of concern is family payments. We have heard a lot about family payments from the speakers before me and from others on this side of the House. This coalition government admits that these cuts to family payments will leave 1.5 million Australian families worse off. These cuts add up for families who are struggling to make ends meet. For example, a typical family with two children and a single income of \$60,000 will lose around \$750 per year. A couple with one child on \$75,000 will lose over \$1,000 per year. That could be the school books or school uniforms. It is a big hole in someone's budget.

Those worst hit will be single parents whose youngest child is 17 or over and finishing school. These particular families will lose over \$3,000 a year in FTB alone. This period when a child is 17 is a time when children cost more. As a father who has two adult boys, I remember the period when they were 17 and finishing high school. That is when the real expenses come in. This is wrong. The costs increase as they get older; we know this. This is a time when it is vital for parents and carers to be able to support their children to stay in school, and these cuts will hurt families in a very real way. On this side of the House, we will stand up for low- and middle-income Australians and families, as we have done since this government began its attack on them in its cruel 2014 budget.

Another area which is being hit hard is paid parental leave. The coalition government's cuts also target new mums and dads. Around 70,000 new mums with a median income of \$62,000 would be \$5,600 worse off on average. That is a big, big cut—\$5,600 worse off. But what can we expect from a government that calls new mums, as we heard earlier, accessing their

entitled paid parental leave as 'double dippers' and 'fraudsters'? These are working women who have bargained for paid parental leave, often at the sacrifice of wage increases. This government is destroying the incentive for employers to provide leave to their employees and making mums choose between returning to work early and cutting their living standards. This is not on. We do not agree with it. We will stand up for their employers, who have done the right thing by providing them with paid parental leave.

We need to protect this scheme, which we introduced, which deliberately allows new mothers to combine leave from their employer with the government scheme. This was done to ensure that as many mothers as possible can get to the 26 weeks of leave recommended by the World Health Organization to spend that early time with their babies—the most crucial time for children. The coalition government wants new mothers to have less time with their babies, capping the scheme at 20 weeks. For instance, a retail worker who gets eight weeks paid parental leave from her employer will have access to only 12 weeks from the government instead of 18 weeks. This means that this new mum will have 20 weeks of paid leave at home instead of 26 weeks. She loses around \$4,030 in support. How can that be right when we are reducing the time and taking approximately \$4,000 off that person? It cannot be right. It is wrong.

Another group of Australians who will really bit hard by this bill is young Australians and income support recipients. Young Australians are very much in the firing line of these cuts. What we have seen is a government that wants young job seekers to live on nothing for five weeks—absolutely nothing. So how can we, in all seriousness, expect young people who fall on hard times to live on absolutely nothing for five weeks? You have lost your job. You cannot get a job. You have fallen on hard times. On top of that, we say, 'Not a single cent for five weeks,' just to make it tougher for them and to make sure that they really hurt. That is what this government is doing, and it is wrong. How are they going to pay their rent? What about bills, such as electricity? What are they going to eat? In addition, the government wants to rip \$48 a week out of the budgets of young Australians by shifting 22- to 24-year-old job seekers from Newstart onto the lower Youth Allowance. That is almost \$2,500 a year!

Labor will always stand up for Australian families by protecting them from these harsh Liberal cuts. We must stand up and protect the rights of our most vulnerable people. I am proud that we will be voting against these measures.

Ms BURNEY (Barton) (18:25): I join with my Labor colleagues in venting our outrage at the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017. We are outraged because of the fact that it is so unfair. We are outraged because of the fact that it is holding vulnerable groups to ransom. How is it holding vulnerable groups to ransom? What has been put forward by this government is that, if you do not pass this omnibus savings bill, we will not be able to fund the NDIS. That is an unacceptable proposition, and Labor will not be countenancing any of that. This morning, Jenny Macklin, the shadow minister, moved amendments to this bill, and those amendments are calling on the government to drop its unfair cuts and holding childcare assistance to ransom.

Doesn't it just say it all that there is no-one on the other side who is prepared to continue this debate and argue the so-called merits of this piece of legislation? The fact that the government cannot be bothered to put up any speakers while this debate is going on says it all. It says it all in many ways. It says to me that the people who are watching this debate and

people who are following this debate will see it as bad politics. It is bad politics for the government to not even come forward and provide the arguments for this omnibus bill. It is difficult to understand why the government would take that position. Perhaps the answer is that what is really absorbing this government is internal machinations, internal arguments, and the very bad governance of government in this country.

We have watched in amazement from this side of the House the way in which this government is beginning to unravel. Not only is it beginning to unravel; but it is unravelling at a great pace. It is unravelling to the point where there are backbenchers who are making very public statements and directly challenging the authority of the Prime Minister. With all of that going on, is it any wonder that there will be the moral ineptitude of putting forward this omnibus so-called savings bill, with the threat that unless you pass it then you will not get the full funding of the NDIS. I think it is reprehensible.

Mr Dick: It's deplorable.

Ms BURNEY: As the member said, it is deplorable. It is really the narrative that I want to focus on today that is beginning to emerge from this government. Many other speakers, including the shadow minister this morning, outlined very clearly what the effects of this bill will be on the many individual groups that are being targeted. But it is the actual narrative that I want to focus on. It is the narrative that is very much emerging as this government's story—the narrative that you can kick and disadvantage vulnerable people, the narrative that you can attack people who are on Centrelink payments, the narrative that it is okay to have a go at the poorest and the most vulnerable, because people won't care. Hasn't the government got it wrong? You only have to see the response to the cynical political judgement that the government made with the Centrelink robo-debt debacle to see that people do actually care. People do actually care when the vulnerable are being attacked unfairly. You only have to go through every aspect of this omnibus bill to understand the unfairness and the unacceptability of this proposed legislation. It is understood not just by the Labor Party but by the broader Australian community. It was well said on Radio National this morning, in the discussion on the fortunes of the Turnbull government. They made the point that what we are seeing now is not an aberration; it is actually a pattern. I could not agree more.

Labor will oppose this bill holus-bolus, and we will pursue the amendments we have put forward not just in this House but in the other place as well. If the government does not drop its unfair cuts and continues to hold childcare assistance to ransom, Labor know that this bill has been referred to a Senate inquiry. A Senate inquiry is what is absolutely needed for this bill because of the unfairness of it and because of the distasteful way in which it has been put forward as a bribe: either pass this or you do not get disability funding in Australia. We will oppose this bill because we will not hold childcare assistance hostage to cuts to family tax benefits and pension supplements, and to a range of other savings measures. Again we see the Turnbull government attempting to play politics with the most vulnerable members of the community and to pit those vulnerable members of the community against each other. This bill, as the previous speaker just said, is robbing Peter to pay Paul, and it is despicable. But the government continues to try to mask its agenda in this way. The House should make no mistake that this is part of the government's view of those in our community who receive assistance.

We remember, writ large, the cigar-smoking Mathias Cormann and Joe Hockey after the 2014 budget. These are the very measures in the 2014 budget that were clearly rejected not just by the parliament but also by the Australian community. The world is not made up of lifters and leaners. People who receive family tax benefits and people who receive Centrelink payments do not do it because they are leaners; they do it because they have a right. As I have said on many occasions, we as a country should be proud of the welfare system that is in place. We as a country should do everything to build that welfare system. Reform is fine—there is no problem with that—but do not rip the system down and destroy people's lives as you do it.

In this particular bill, look at the way in which, for example, cuts to family payments are going to affect families. Families losing their family tax benefit A will be \$200 worse off per child. Families losing their family tax benefit B will lose \$350 a year. Those cuts add up for families who are struggling to make ends meet. For example, a typical family with two children and a single income of \$60,000 will lose \$750 a year. A couple on \$75,000 with one child will lose over \$1,000 a year. People on the other side of the House may think that that is not very much money, but let me assure you that—and you only have to talk to your constituents in the electorates that you represent to understand this—they are very large amounts of money for people. It can mean the difference between registering your car and not doing so. It can mean the difference between making sure your kids are well outfitted to go to school and not. It can mean the difference between going to the doctor and not. It has massive ramifications.

The issues around young Australians and income support recipients are an outrage—an absolute outrage. Put yourself in the shoes of a 20-year-old who is desperately trying to find work, who finds themselves having to apply for a Centrelink youth allowance and is told, 'Sorry—you can't get anything for five weeks.' How do you pay rent? How do you go to the doctor? How do you buy food? How do you survive? The answer is that you do not, and therefore you have to rely on others.

The issues around pensioners have been well canvassed, and the issues around child care have been well canvassed. But I will say this: there is a very long list of representative organisations and providers of child care that have added their voices to what Labor is saying. They include the Australian Childcare Alliance, Family Day Care Australia, Gowrie Australia, The Benevolent Society, the Brotherhood of St Laurence, United Voice, the Affinity Education Group, Goodstart Early Learning and Early Childhood Management Services. The list goes on. They are not small outfits. They are either providers or people who understand this system extremely well. If people and groups such as the ones I have just read out into *Hansard* are saying this is wrong then what on earth is the government doing in terms of not listening?

I will finish my contribution by focusing on what this is going to mean for Indigenous children, remembering that we talked about the *Closing the gap* report the last time that the House sat. How on earth the government thinks that the measures in this package as they relate to Indigenous children are going to close the gap just astounds me. They are going to widen the gap. We already know from that report that the measures around early childhood education are not being met. The childcare package will end the current Budget Based Funded Program that provides direct subsidies to 300 mostly Indigenous services. These services

reach 20,000 children. They are often small, and they are often in remote communities. The government saying that there will be no direct Budget Based Funded Program is going to have a terrible effect on these services.

The Secretariat of National Aboriginal and Islander Child Care say:

These changes will diminish our kids' potential to make a smooth transition to school, compounding the likelihood of intergenerational disempowerment and unemployment.

Alarming, that will make Aboriginal children more at risk of removal into out-of-home care. We know exactly what the out-of-home care situation is for the First Nations children. It is just an absolute scandal that the government would even consider these reforms in the context of out-of-home care and Aboriginal children.

I will finish up by saying that, before the 2013 election, the Liberals promised more affordable and accessible child care. Instead they went the whole last term of parliament without doing anything at all about childcare costs for ordinary Australian families. A child born when the Liberals promised their affordable child care will be in school by the time this government deliver anything—if they ever do. Early education and care is an investment in the future. It is the best early intervention that you can possibly provide. The government need to listen to the experts, fix their package and stop playing silly political games by holding the sector ransom to these nasty cuts. It is cynical, it is misguided and it underestimates the sense of fairness that the Australian community has. Jenny Macklin said it today: it underestimates the fairness that is very much a part of who we are as Australians.

Judgement day will come. That judgement will come because of these sorts of pieces of legislation. That judgement will come because this government is very rapidly developing a narrative of not caring, that you can kick the poor and that you can put the disadvantaged and vulnerable up against each other and let them fight it out. This side of the House, the Labor opposition, will never tolerate that approach. It is wrong, it is cynical and, as I said, it underestimates the basic fairness of the Australian community.

Ms TEMPLEMAN (Macquarie) (18:40): I rise to speak on the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017, otherwise known as the omnibus bill. For more than three years, the only childcare program that this government put in place was the nanny pilot program, which in itself was ill conceived and poorly executed. But this is a vital area. We are not just talking about babysitting that allows mums or dads to go back to work. This is about how we educate young minds so that they are ready to thrive by the time they get into the school system.

This education needs to happen in a number of ways. It is not easy. It is not surprising that the other side have found it a really challenging policy area. But there are few things that need to be taken into account. It needs to recognise the value and importance of the educators who are caring for our children. It needs to be done in an affordable way so mums and dads have the ability to be in the workforce. We agree that it is not easy to get it right, but this government have chosen to come up with a package that will leave one in three families worse off. They have taken all this time and the best they could do was a package that leaves one in three families worse off. You need to be pretty clever to get it that wrong!

What is really awful about the way this government are pushing through this change is that they are tying it to a swathe of cuts to family and pensioner benefits. I will talk about those in

more detail later. Let's first talk about some of the flaws of the childcare package. The member for Barton has so eloquently spoken of the hypocrisy of what we heard in the closing-the-gap speeches only a week or so ago and what we see here, because the changes in this childcare reform threaten to close Indigenous and remote childcare services. We are worried about the impact on mobile services in rural and remote areas. The subsidies for these programs have effectively been scrapped, and there has been no guarantee given that services will not be forced to close. Nobody wins when some children are disproportionately disadvantaged. If we fail to invest the funds at the early childhood level, we will pay a much bigger price further down the track. This is a poor element in the childcare reform package.

One of the other key problems in this proposed legislation lies with the new activity test for subsidised care. It is a complicated test that has been brought in. It removes the current entitlement that all children get two days of early education. Remember that this is not child care on its own; it is education. This is not just paying someone a pittance to babysit. We know the developmental stuff that happens in this phase can change a child's educational future. I wish we knew that when my children were that age. We know that 150,000 families are going to be worse off. The new test halves the subsidy that many families can access and removes eligibility completely for some children with non-working parents. If the parents work casually or part time, their children's chances of accessing stable, subsidised early education will be seriously under threat with these changes. This is exactly the section of the community where we can break intergenerational cycles through early education that then gets followed throughout school. That is the reason we need the Gonski reforms to be continued. It is because we can build on this and change a child's future.

The Social Policy Research Centre at the University of New South Wales summed it up really well. They said:

... the new, three-tiered activity test introduces a level of complexity never seen before in the Australian childcare system.

No-one said the system was too simple. That is not what these reforms are about. The system was always complex. But here we are: we have legislation that introduces a level of complexity never seen before. The Social Policy Research Centre at the university notes:

... the Bill introduces provisions that will increase the complexity and reduce accessibility and affordability for some of the most vulnerable children and families.

What kind of reform is that? It is the opposite to the sort of reform that we need.

We know that 90 per cent of a child's brain development occurs in the first five years of life. Children who attend quality education do go on to do better in school. They do better in employment and they do better in life. Certainly, if I had young children, I would prefer them to be starting school with the cohort of children who had been in good quality early education. That takes some of the differences out that you see in a kindergarten class once they hit school. That is going to make teaching easier for teachers. It is going to mean the kids all have a better chance of success.

Early education should be recognised for its ability to help in solving social problems. I think that is what the other side failing to understand. They are actually creating problems further down the track with this legislation. There is clear and long-standing research to show that vulnerable and disadvantaged children have the most to gain from early education. We do not want to see those children worse off.

Let's talk about the implications of how this new activity test plays out. Does it make it easier for parents to work? That is, supposedly, one of the objectives of this package. Well, in fact, the new activity test will make it harder for many parents, particularly those who, as I mentioned, are in part-time or casual jobs, and especially for those who are trying to get back into the workforce. It puts parents in, as the shadow minister described, an unfair catch 22. They are not going to be able to get work because they cannot get child care, but they are not able to get child care because, guess what, they do not have work. It hardly sounds like a solution to any problem. Parents getting back in the workforce actually need to be able to say to their employer when they can work. They need to know with certainty what access they will have. This activity test means that parents will actually have to be worried about whether they meet the work requirements. So if you are casual and you do not get as many shifts, will you suddenly lose eligibility for child care? These are criticisms not just from Labor. This new activity test has been criticised by just about every reputable organisation that works in this field—everyone from UnitingCare, Mission Australia, Anglicare, United Voice, The Benevolent Society, the Early Learning and Care Council of Australia, the Australian Childcare Alliance and Early Childhood Australia. So you do not actually have to take my word. These are the experts, and that is what they are telling us.

So those are some of the flaws with the actual childcare reform. But I want to spend the next few minutes thinking about what price is being paid by the rest of society for this childcare package and, for the same people who may get some benefits from it, what price they are paying at a different part or a different phase of their life. For a start: the loss of paid parental leave when you have a baby. It stands to reason that before you have a child going to child care you actually have to have the baby. I spoke to one mum out at my mobile office in Glossodia this weekend in the Hawkesbury in my seat of Macquarie. Having looked at these changes, she is thinking of trying to bring forward a pregnancy to a time before she is really ready to have a second time. She has a beautiful baby. He is not even one yet. She is about to go back to work and she is worried about the timing of the second baby. She wants me to keep her posted on the passage, or not, of this omnibus bill. That is the sort of impact you have on women when you say, 'We are going to take away your paid parental leave.' She works for an employer where it has been negotiated that the employees get paid parental leave. That is not an entitlement that they were just given; that is one that they negotiated and bargained for. Now, the threat is that that will be taken away, so she will miss out on the full entitlement that she has had with her first child. We are talking about something that will leave her potentially \$5,600 worse off. And, more to the point, it will mean she is not at home as long to do that really crucial first few months—ideally, 26 weeks, and even better if it is longer. I think the government probably does not realise the sort of impact it is having on women by attaching this paid parental leave exclusion to this bill.

The paid parental leave should not be traded away. It not only benefits the mother and the child, and the rest of the family, but actually benefits us all. You have 70,000 new mums who are thinking, 'I'm not really keen on what is being proposed here.' The other things that are being taken away, of course, are family tax benefits. In my electorate of Macquarie, around 8,500 families receive family tax benefit part A, many of whom will be worse off by \$200 per child. Around 6,500 Macquarie families will lose \$354 as a result of the abolition of the family tax benefit part B end-of-year supplement. They might not be big amounts for the people opposite, but that is the sort of stuff that allows you to send your child to a music

lesson or do those swimming lessons that are so vital. It is that little bit that just gives you a difference between bare necessities and something that really enriches your life. I think it is quite cruel to tie this childcare reform to those sorts of savings. We are talking about a family with two children and a single income of \$60,000 being \$750 worse off a year. You tell me where those families are going to get that money from. They are certainly not going to get them by working an extra shift on a Sunday, thanks to the cuts to penalty rates. So you are making it harder at every turn for these families.

The other cut that we are seeing in this bill is the cut to the energy supplement for pensioners, people with a disability, carers and Newstart recipients. Scrapping the energy supplement to new pensioners is going to be a cut of about \$14 a fortnight for single pensioners. That is \$365 a year. For couples, we are talking \$550 a year worse off. Again, these may not be big amounts to those opposite, but they are significant to people on lower incomes.

One of the moves that horrifies me is the forcing of young jobseekers to wait five weeks. Like other speakers, I think that by the time a young jobseeker goes onto Newstart they have probably run through all their savings. They are holding out and looking for work for as long as they can before they need to go and seek government support. I really fear for those young people. I have children in their twenties. I look at some of their friends. They do it tough. They do not have savings. This is going to make their lives even harder, as will the cuts to support for young people, where the 22- and 24-year-olds will be pushed from Newstart onto youth allowance, thereby losing around \$48 a week. I have to tell you that I have a 25-year-old and a 22-year-old, and their landlords do not make an adjustment to their rent on the basis of their age. Funnily enough, their food does not cost less either, nor do their clothes. Their phone bills are not reduced because of their age. This sort of cut is very arbitrary and likely to cause real pain.

The other thing that will affect people in my electorate is the cut to migrants' pensions for migrants who spend more than six weeks overseas after working a lifetime here and then taking a well-earned rest in their mother country. In my community there is a Maltese community, and they have raised with me that it is not unusual for people to spend an extended time with family in Malta having spent decades in Australia and, finally, when they retire and go onto a pension they might just have the time away from work to be able to do it. They do not necessarily have a lot of money, but they can stay with family. These cuts means that after just six weeks overseas pensioners who have lived in Australia for less than 35 years are going to have that rate of the pension cut. That is hurting migrant families and migrant communities. All of these things might not sound like they are a lot to those opposite, but to my community they are painful cuts.

We are really happy to work with the government on child care reform. That is what this bill was meant to be. It is vital that we get it right. To say that we can afford to give multinationals \$50 billion tax breaks, but the only way we can pay for child care increases is by making lower- and middle-income Australians pay for it in some other way, just does not cut it. These are choices that this government is making, just like they are making the choice not to protect penalty rates. This is an entirely a choice, and it will hit women particularly hard. When the government re-introduced the child care changes they claimed it would cost \$3 billion. Now it is actually only costing \$1.6 billion, yet they are keeping their unfair cuts

and tying it to the NDIS. They do not need to. There is an opportunity to get reform right here, and we would be happy to help.

Mr HART (Bass) (18:55): I rise today to speak on the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Childcare Reform) Bill 2017. This bill is effectively the reintroduction of the remainder of the government's 2014 zombie cuts. Families, new mums, pensioners and young people are all in the firing line as a result of the Turnbull government's latest round of harsh cuts. For many Australians already struggling to make ends meet these proposed cuts are deeply concerning. Indeed, there are few who will not be impacted one way or another by these unfair changes proposed by the Turnbull government. And that is even before the government's failure to act to protect the incomes of low-paid workers.

Before I go into detail, let me point out some of what I might call the low lights that are found in this legislation. Firstly, there are cuts to family benefits that will leave a typical family on \$60,000 around \$750 a year worse off. There are cuts to paid parental leave—70,000 new mums will be worse off. Scrapping the energy supplement is a \$1 billion cut to pensioners, people with disability, carers and Newstart recipients. A five-week wait for Newstart will force young people to live off nothing for five weeks before they can access income support. There are cuts to young people between the ages of 22 and 24 by pushing them onto the lower youth allowance—that is a cut of around \$48 a week or almost \$2,500 a year. The bill scraps the pensioner education supplement and the education entry payment, and cutting the pension to migrant pensioners who spend more than six weeks overseas.

These changes are just the latest move in the Turnbull government's sustained attack on the living standards of everyday Australians. This is an attack which has new targets, given the loss of penalty rates just last week and the Prime Minister's refusal to stand up for the rights of low-paid workers.

Labor's position with respect to this legislation has been consistently put since it opposed the unfair cuts first mooted in the 2014 Federal Budget. The government of the then Prime Minister Tony Abbott was roundly criticised for being out of touch and failing to recognise the widespread community disillusionment in not addressing the issue of fairness in the 2014 federal budget. Who can forget that iconic photograph of the then Federal Treasurer, the former member for North Sydney, Mr Hockey, and Senator Cormann smoking cigars in a haze of self-congratulation and hubris? There was sustained public criticism regarding the unfair 2014 budget, and ultimately even this government, a government with a tin ear for public opinion, was able to concede that errors had been made and that some changes needed to be made.

However, this government's deception has constantly been laid bare in that these so-called zombie measures have been included in subsequent financial reporting and are now exhumed in all their rotting glory. We therefore had a government that promised it was listening to the concerns of the community in respect of a program that was fundamentally unfair, but nevertheless was unprepared to abandon these measures in a quest for budget repair. Its duplicity is laid bare in this package of legislation. This bully government is unable to articulate the need to disadvantage families, mothers returning to work, pensioners and young people—those who are often already disadvantaged. It just prefers the interests of the big end of town. Why does this out of touch government wish to attack the most disadvantaged in our communities? What they are seeking to do is to hurt some of the most disadvantaged in our

community, including regional and remote communities doing it tough, so that they can gift big business—who, I might add, are reporting record profits as of today—a further \$10 billion of tax cuts.

Labor's message has not been against repair of the budget, but has been consistently in favour of budget repair that is fair. I say it again, because those opposite choose to ignore our message around fairness: we propose budget repair that is fair, budget repair that does not rely upon flawed trickle-down economics that prefers the interests of those who are better off at the expense of those who are not. We speak about investment in nation building, in education, in the social safety net. They cut; we build the nation and we protect our communities. Labor has consistently argued for the retention of Medicare, fully funding Gonski and the protection of the disadvantaged in our communities. Instead, with respect to the most recent budget, the government has chosen to spend in excess of \$50 billion on tax cuts to large corporations on the basis of the failed mantra of trickle-down economics when their own Treasury figures rely upon economic growth being delivered as a consequence of changes to taxation in 10 years. This government continues to pursue the lines of a confidence trickster using distraction, hyperbole and, if all else fails, a message which boils down to: trust us as the better economic managers. The government admit that their family payment cuts will leave 1.5 million Australian families worse off.

Nothing this government says or does should be taken on trust. There is no residue of trust in this government, for good reason. The Prime Minister has taken positions with regard to a range of issues that demonstrate that he is a hostage to the conservative right of the Liberal-National Party. Now we see that this Prime Minister and this Liberal government are prepared to formally preference the One Nation party, rather than pursue a course that John Howard ultimately imposed upon the state divisions of the coalition—that One Nation should not receive Liberal or National preferences. Now we have the Prime Minister talking up the positive aspects of this childcare package and linking cuts to social services to supposedly pay for the childcare package. Again, this is deception and distraction from a failing government.

This government is not only holding families to ransom to pay for child care, but it also continues to have in its sights those who are pensioners, young Australians and also new mothers. The numbers involved are significant. There is \$2.7 billion worth of cuts to family payments, which are supposed to pay for \$1.6 billion in a package of child care. The minister some weeks ago went dangerously close to misleading the House as to the fact that the cuts to family payments were being applied towards the cost of the childcare package and, when pressed, had to concede that families were losing more than the cost of the childcare package. In other words, the cuts were being concealed by the extra expenditure in the childcare package. The extent to which this confidence trick is sought to be foisted on Australian families is illustrated by the fact that for every \$1 spent on child care in the proposed childcare assistant package, \$3.30 will be ripped off pensioners, families, new mums and young Australians—that is, for every \$1, \$3.30 goes to fund tax cuts for handouts to big business and this government's administrative incompetence.

The numbers involved in this heist are amazing, if not terrifying. In total, these measures rip \$5.6 billion from the household budgets of low-income Australians. These cuts add up for families who are struggling to make ends meet. Some of these families will have additional burdens come 1 July or whenever the unfair cuts to penalty rates take effect. For example, a

single income family with two children on an income of \$60,000 will lose around \$750 per year, while a couple with one child on \$75,000 will lose over \$1,000 a year. Around 8,120 families in my electorate of Bass receive family tax benefit part A. Many of them will lose over \$200 per child. Around 6,335 Bass families will lose \$354 as a result of the abolition of the family tax benefit part B end-of-year supplement. Labor opposes these unfair cuts to family tax benefits.

After years of sustained attack since the horror 2014 budget, Australian families know they cannot trust the Liberals to help them get ahead or to protect Medicare and fully fund Gonski. This government is so dastardly that the worst hit by their mean-spirited policies are single parents, who will lose \$3,000 a year in family tax benefit when they need it most. And when might that be? For their teenager's 17th birthday, just as they are entering one of the most stressful times in their life—the HSC. We want our young people to be focused on finishing their high school studies, not worrying about the already difficult financial pressures of their single parent. My son has relatively recently gone through this very period, and those in this House who have had the pleasure of a teenager know the growing costs involved as they get older. How does this government assist these growing costs for single parents? That is right, a \$3,000 a year cut to the family budget.

Labor has consistently stood up for low- and middle-income Australians. We know what is fair. We know that a strong social safety net is important. We cannot allow this place to become like the USA. I know in my electorate of Bass that there is sound economic argument that small business is sustained by the fact that those on low and middle incomes typically expend most of their income on nondiscretionary spending. In other words, most of the income of low- or middle-income families goes directly into the local community buying goods and services. It is for this reason, for example, that cuts to penalty rates adversely affect small business in small communities and regional Australia, due to the fact that all reduced wages of the workers are unable to support the goods and services in those workers' communities. This is why I am concerned not just for those facing cuts in their take-home pay, I am deeply concerned for the effect of the cuts to income and these cuts to benefits and allowances will have on my part of regional Australia.

Community is what Labor stands for. Families, workers, children, pensioners, mothers, fathers: Labor wants our families to grow and prosper in a vital and flexible economy. But we want them to participate in economic growth that is fair. We know that Australian women traditionally taking on the burden of workforce participation and the majority of unpaid domestic and caring work is a large contributing factor to Australia's 16.2 per cent gender pay gap. That is why Labor has had the sense to refer to an inquiry the means of parental assistance to the Productivity Commission. It was clear from the commission that this was a financially beneficial change for the community and businesses. Labor's original scheme was designed to complement payments available under existing employment arrangements so as to generate the greatest impact for the least amount of financial assistance whilst also ensuring that businesses could continue to use these schemes as a recruitment incentive for talented women. This government should stop focusing on gifting \$50 billion dollars to big business and focus on the real issue at play here; ensuring children get the best start in life. That is a prescription for long-term sustainable growth.

The government also wants new mothers to have less time with their babies, capping the parental leave scheme at 20 weeks. This means that new mothers will have 20 weeks of paid leave at home instead of 26 weeks, although experts recommend mums need six months at home caring for their newborn; not to mention that the same new mother will also lose around \$4,030 in support. Labor does not believe that new mums should be forced to choose between returning to work early and missing out on time with their newborn or staying at home and having their living standards cut. This legislation is emblematic of the difference between those opposite and Labor. Labor will stand up for families. Labor will stand up for disadvantaged in our communities.

This government has stopped listening. It is led by an out-of-touch Prime Minister who is determined to pursue an unfair agenda.

Ms CLAYDON (Newcastle) (19:08): I rise today to oppose the Turnbull government's Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017 in the strongest possible terms. This is a bill which shows just how cruel, how vindictive and how manipulative the Turnbull government really is. This is a government that is soft on multinational tax avoidance but hard on families. It is a government that is ruthlessly determined to take from those who cannot afford it in order to prop up those who do not need it. And it is a government that has shown there are no levels it will not stoop to in order to maintain privileges for the top end of town.

In the past month, we have seen some of the most deplorable divide and conquer tactics from the Turnbull government in its desperation to get this bill through the parliament. Because, of course, the government desperately needs the cuts levied in this legislation as a down-payment for its corporate cash splash. That is what this bill is really about—slashing brutally from families and low-income Australians so Mr Turnbull can give big business and the banks a windfall. The Prime Minister has promised \$50 billion of tax cuts to big business and now he is trying make families, jobseekers, young people, income support recipients, new parents and pensioners pay the price.

If those opposite were honest about their intentions, they would link welfare cuts to corporate tax cuts. They would make these wasteful and reckless cuts contingent on the passing of the savage cuts to ordinary Australians in this bill. But of course, they are not honest. No. Instead, they have cynically and arbitrarily tied these cuts to greater investment in child care. Now, let's be clear. There is nothing inherent or natural about the link between childcare and welfare cuts. They did not need to be in the same bill. Linking them was nothing but a crude political strategy to blackmail the parliament into passing this regressive legislation. Holding child care hostage is spiteful, sneaky and completely unnecessary. And, as we have seen, it has not worked, with reports that the Senate still will not pass the legislation in its current form. Of course, what the government would do if it was honourable would be to split out all the measures so the parliament is able to consider each measure on its own merits. This is exactly what literally tens of early education providers and representative organisations have called for. But, as we see far too often, this government is far from honourable. In fact, rather than splitting the bills to ensure that the things the parliament does agree on do not get held up, the government has upped up the ante in the most deplorable way.

When pitting parents of young children against pensioners, jobseekers and families did not work, they did not back down. No. They doubled down and held a gun to the NDIS, suggesting that if the parliament refused to pass the cruel cuts before us today then the NDIS would lose billions of dollars. Four years ago, those opposite said they were at one with Labor on the NDIS. But this month they trashed this vital bipartisanship, put a question mark over future funding for this landmark social reform and plunged thousands of Australians into uncertainty.

It is appalling that this government has no problems with using the NDIS and childcare funding as pawns in their cruel political games. And it just goes to show that the Prime Minister's promise to place fairness at the centre of all government decisions was as hollow as his belief in marriage equality or his commitment to real action on climate change. It also demonstrates that Mr Turnbull has completely failed to learn the lessons of his predecessor and the thoroughly toxic 2014 budget. In fact, the majority of the items in the legislation before us today are recycled zombie measures that were fundamentally rejected by the parliament and by the Australian people three years ago. These are the very same measures from the budget that led to Mr Abbott and Mr Hockey losing their jobs. But the Prime Minister has again showed just how beholden he is to his right wing masters by putting up this bill before us today. He has chosen to try to save his own job rather than saving millions of Australians from further hardship.

I would like to spend some time now looking at the specifics of the bill, starting with the childcare measures. Those opposite went to the 2013 election promising more affordable and accessible child care. For three years, they did nothing. Then they went to the 2016 election promising to spend \$3 billion on reducing the childcare cost burden on Australian families. Now, we find that the actual investment is little more than half that at \$1.6 billion. And a recent ANU analysis found that one in three families will actually be worse off under the government's childcare plan. In fact, more than 71,000 families earning less than \$65,000 a year will go backwards. Many children in low-income families will have their access to early education slashed from 24 weeks to just 12. It will also make it harder for parents who work part-time or casually to get stable access to early childhood education and care.

Rural and remote childcare services, particularly those for Indigenous communities, are also at risk, as the government has refused to commit to guarantee ongoing financial support for 300 Indigenous and mobile services. The government's plan to transition them to the mainstream model is completely unrealistic. These services perform a key role by providing childcare services in areas where the market would otherwise have failed to deliver. Indeed, most of these services are the only childcare providers in their respective regions. If they are lost, the impact on these communities will be significant.

In fact, Deloitte Access Economics has found that the impacts will be severe. Fifty-four per cent of families will face an average fee increase of \$4.40 an hour, 40 per cent of families will have their access to early education reduced, and over two-thirds of Indigenous early childhood education services will have their funding cut. But, despite the clear failings of the childcare package and despite the massive drop in the government's investment, Mr Turnbull still sees fit to hold support for families, pensioners, young people and the NDIS to ransom.

Labor support increased investment in child care, but we will not support it at the expense of vulnerable people and Australian families—and that is exactly what this government is

asking us to do today. Even the government itself has admitted that 1.5 million Australian families will be worse off as a result of its cuts to family tax benefits.

The first thing the government wants to do is abolish the family tax benefit A end-of-year supplement. This will cost families \$200 per child. Those families that receive family tax benefit B will take a \$350 hit each year. These cuts would see a typical family on a single income of \$60,000, with two kids, lose around \$750 a year; a couple on \$75,000, with one child, lose over \$1,000 per year; and single parents whose youngest child is over 17 and still in high school, lose their FTB B payments entirely, a loss of \$3,186 a year including the supplement. It is ridiculous that the government should be trying to sell this legislation as a boon for families when it clearly gives a little with one hand and rips away a whole lot more with the other.

Labor is also deeply concerned about the impacts of this legislation for new parents. This government wants new mothers to have less time to recover and bond with their babies, and will cap the current scheme at 20 weeks. The government's suggestion that women who use the current paid parental leave system are double dipping is totally unfair and utterly wrong. Let us not forget that the government scheme was deliberately designed to encourage employer contributions to help as many new parents as possible get the World Health Organization's recommended 26 weeks off work to recover, bond and breastfeed. The government's proposal in this bill will leave around 70,000 new mothers worse off each year, and undermine the very purpose and design of the existing scheme. This removes the incentive for employers to offer paid parental leave to their staff, and forces new mothers to choose between returning to work early and cutting their living standards.

But it is not just families and parents-to-be who are targeted by this legislation; anyone who receives government income support will also be hit. The government plans to freeze income-free areas and means-test thresholds for three years for working-age allowances, except student payments. Students will be forced to endure a three-year freeze to income-free areas and other means-test thresholds, including the student income bank limits. This will mean that income-free areas will fail to keep pace with the cost of living. Labor is particularly concerned about the impacts on jobseekers, who rely on an already low payment rate. It is good to see the minister, the Minister for Social Services, in the chamber for this debate.

But the cuts do not end there. The government also plans to close the energy supplement to new pension and allowance recipients. This means that single pensioners will be \$365 a year worse off, and pensioners in a couple will be \$550 worse off a year. Newstart recipients will lose \$229 a year. Again, Labor is aware that there are significant concerns about the adequacy of Newstart as it is, and these cuts will just serve to drive jobseekers further into poverty. When the Business Council says that Newstart is so low that it is actually a disincentive to finding work, you know there is a problem! Even KPMG has called for the Newstart rate to be increased.

It is an appalling indictment of this Turnbull government that it is driving jobseekers further into poverty so it can prop up its tax cuts for big business. This is especially galling when the government is refusing to lift a finger while hundreds of thousands of the lowest paid Australians are having their penalty rates cut. Let us not forget Mr Turnbull gave himself a \$6,500 tax cut this year. But now he wants to force all income recipients to live on nothing for a week.

Not only will young jobseekers have to wait a week, with no income at all; the government also plans to make 22- to 24-year-olds ineligible for Newstart, instead forcing them onto the much lower youth allowance. This will be devastating for the 240,000 young jobseekers who will lose \$48 a week. This might be loose change for Mr Turnbull, but for young jobseekers it could mean that basic expenses like rent and power bills do not get paid. But it gets worse. Shamefully, jobseekers under 25 will also have their waiting periods extended by four weeks, on top of the one-week waiting period for all other payments. This is a horrendous measure that will see around 75,000 young jobseekers trying to survive with absolutely no income for five weeks. Despite what those opposite seem to think, unemployment is not a lifestyle choice for the vast majority of jobseekers; and starving young Australians will do anything to improve their chances of finding work. The Turnbull government should focus less on punishing jobseekers and a lot more on creating the jobs.

It is clear that the legislation before us today is a recipe for increasing poverty and entrenching inequality. The bill demonstrates the depths those opposite are willing to plumb to attack the most vulnerable Australians so they can continue to prop up big business and high-income earners. It is an appalling indictment on this government that, when wages growth is at its lowest on record and when inequality sits at a 75-year high, those opposite continue to hit the poor so they can reward the wealthy. This bill is a direct attack on the social contract that sits at the core of our national identity and it is a shocking affront to our sense of a fair go.

Labor will continue to defend families and the lowest-paid people in the country and we will continue to oppose the Turnbull government's vicious agenda of tax cuts for the big end of town and income cuts for low-income Australians.

Mr KEOGH (Burt) (19:23): I spoke with reference to the Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017 only a week or so ago and at that time I observed that this legislation was put forward by the government on, of all days, Valentine's Day—a day that is usually referred to as a day of love. What this legislation really highlights is how this government is a love-hate government. Whilst this government does love big business and wants to give big business a \$50 billion tax cut, it seems to hate ordinary Australians. This legislation is a bill that takes much more than it gives.

It is laudable that the government has recognised that we do need to make some changes to our childcare system in this country so that more people can access affordable child care. That is a laudable ambition. However, the way in which the government has gone about trying to do that with this legislation and the way it has married up a laudable objective—not really with great detail, I have to say, there are definitely problems with what it is trying to achieve—with massive cuts to family payments for ordinary Australians really demonstrate where this government's priorities lie.

The thing that really highlights it is that we have a situation right now in Australia of what is euphemistically referred to as 'an economy in recovery' or 'a transitional economy'. I can tell you right now that in Western Australian we have had two consecutive quarters of net state demand being negative—I think that is what is technically called a recession—and people are hurting. Ordinary Australians are hurting all around the country; in Western Australia they are particularly hurting; and of course the people who hurt most are those who earn the least. And those are the people who benefit from family tax benefits and people who

have come onto Newstart payments because they have found themselves out of work through no fault of their own. This is what happens when we get to what was referred to by the Reserve Bank governor as 'the other end of the cycle', followed by the decline in mining construction in my home state.

At a time when people are hurting more, this government's response is: 'We're going to take more money off you.' I do not think that is the right approach for any government, and we should not be letting this government get away with that. We have these cuts—\$2.7 billion worth of cuts to family payments and a total of \$5.6 billion being ripped out of family budgets. Many of those household budgets were hitherto supported by Sunday penalty rates. So we have the double whammy. At the same time we hear, and it has been put to me, 'Oh, well, it's okay if people have a reduction in their penalty rate income because they will pay less tax.' When you are already not paying tax and when you are trying to benefit from receiving these welfare payments—whether they are FBT benefits or other sorts of supplements, which will no longer be indexed but capped or frozen for three years—that really makes life even harder.

This legislation in particular demonstrates almost the cruelty of this government—linking a supposed benefit in changes to be childcare benefit with cuts to other benefits. The government will say and has said, 'Well, sometimes you have to make hard decisions. You've got to make cuts to pay for these benefits. We have a budget emergency'—as they have been telling us for years, not that they have done anything about that, I might add; they have just let the debt and deficit blow out. To tackle their budget emergency or to pay for some extra benefits for people who need child care, what do they do? They think: 'How can we pay for that? What should we cut?' They look through the budget. They went through all of the lines of the budget and wondered what they should cut. This government had a great idea. This government thought, 'Do you know who we should cut back on? Do you know who we should take that money off? We should take that money off people who get family tax benefit. We should take that money off people who get the pension'—people who have paid taxes their entire lives—'We should take that money off people who are on Newstart allowance. We should take that money off young mums and off Australians trying to go to university. We should freeze the indexation of their payments.'

This is a very odd set of priorities by a government, Mr Deputy Speaker To look through an entire Commonwealth budget and ask, 'Where can I save a few billion dollars? I will save it from Australia's poorest people.' The thing that really jars for me about that, and I think it jars for all Australians, is that in the whole context of the Commonwealth budget when looking at what could be saved the thing that did not occur to them was \$50 billion worth of tax cuts for large businesses. It did not occur to them—I am going to make a suggestion here to the government—to reduce the tax cut so that it is only, say, \$48 billion worth of tax cuts so that it did not have to do take that money off the poorest Australians, those who are struggling the most and those who are finding it the hardest to get by and those who need the most support. If we take this back out to the macro level—

Debate interrupted.

ADJOURNMENT

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (19:30): I propose the question:

That the House do now adjourn.

Brand Electorate: Southern Communities Advocacy Legal and Education Service

Ms MADELEINE KING (Brand) (19:30): The Southern Communities Advocacy Legal Education Service, or SCALES as it is better known, is a much needed, heavily relied on community legal centre which provides legal services predominantly to the Rockingham and Kwinana communities in my beautiful electorate of Brand in Western Australia. SCALES also assists many people living outside of these areas if they are in need. The only centre of its kind in Western Australia, this independent not-for-profit community legal centre is also the site of the Murdoch University Law School Clinic. This clinic provides invaluable clinical education programs which assist not only the participating students but the clients of the centre who receive legal services from supervised final-year law students.

Since April 1997, SCALES has been providing free legal services to low-income and disadvantaged people, and demand for its services is increasing all the time. Without SCALES, many local people would not be able to access the legal services that they need. Last year alone, SCALES provided legal services to 741 people and provided a further 1,500 people with information and referrals. They had to turn away hundreds of people due to a lack of resources. Like so many community legal centres across the country, SCALES is set to lose 30 per cent of its funding from 1 July this year, thanks to the devastating and deplorable cuts by Attorney-General George Brandis and the Turnbull government.

Shortly after its 20th anniversary of delivering quality legal support to those in need, instead of celebrating this massive achievement and it being a steadfast community institution, SCALES will face a massive threat to its future because of these crippling cuts. I know how hard managing director, Gai Walker, and the dedicated team of solicitors and support staff work to best assist some of the most vulnerable people in the community of Brand. I know SCALES does its best to help clients dealing with serious matters, including Centrelink debts—and we know we are getting a lot more of those and half of them are fake—tenancy disputes and employment issues. Gai and her team have told me about the increase in the complexity and, sadly, the urgency and danger in their clients' cases. They have clients who face having their children taken into care, clients facing homelessness and clients hurting from domestic violence situations.

It might concern the Attorney-General—then again, it might not—in light of his commitment to slash this centre's funding, that 40 per cent of clients presenting at SCALES have domestic violence as part of their legal issue. This is a centre staffed by dedicated people dealing with domestic violence issues daily, which for three years running has seen more and more funding cuts to its essential services to the community. I struggle to see how this government can justify these cuts in the face of its National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children. I call on the government to actually look at the impact that slashing 30 per cent of this great community legal centre will have on those who are in desperate need of its support. If anything, with the handing down of the Fair Work Commission's decision to slash the penalty rates of some of the lowest paid workers in the community, demand on community legal centres such as SCALES in Rockingham will grow even more. It is a fact that reducing penalty rates, which the Turnbull government today has supported, will have a greater negative impact on women. Women are more likely to rely on

penalty rates to meet household expenses and, sadly, women are more likely to need the services of community legal centres to help them with issues, particularly domestic violence.

People taking home less money in their pay packets, which is what the cuts to penalty rates means, will put increasing strain on household budgets. It is not hard, then, to see how families will suffer from financial stresses, will struggle to pay the rent or the mortgage, will have to engage with Centrelink and will face employment issues. An increase in the number of low-income people in the community will again increase the numbers of potential clients in need of community legal centre services. With even less funding, centres like SCALES will be unable to assist them. These centres are already running at capacity and will have to deal with even more demand with a third of their funding gone. Last year alone, 10 per cent of SCALES' clients were living with disability, six per cent were of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent and 65 per cent were women. Without SCALES, without the community legal centres across the country, these people will be further disadvantaged by the government's cruel cuts to these much needed services. The Attorney-General might consider getting out in the community a bit more and visiting community legal centres such as SCALES, but we know he does not do that too often. He might pop down to Rockingham and have a chat to Gai Walker and her staff. Then he might see more of the desperately important and challenging work that they do. I hope he might be convinced to stop cutting important services to those in our community who need help the most. Sadly, it is unlikely and it is, in a word, deplorable.

Western Australian Regional Liberals

Ms PRICE (Durack) (19:35): I am very pleased to rise in the House tonight to speak about a group of people who are delivering for the bush in Western Australia like no other. I speak of the WA regional Liberals. The WA regional Liberals are delivering right across regional, rural and remote Western Australia—from the member for O'Connor, Rick Wilson, representing the Goldfields-Esperance region and my home town of Kalgoorlie down to Albany in the state's south, to myself representing the Kimberley in the north and east to Southern Cross, and not forgetting the good member for Forrest, Nola Marino, representing Western Australians in the south-west. Earlier today, I spoke about the federal government's National Stronger Regions Fund, which has assisted vital projects to be developed in many parts of regional Western Australia.

Of course, WA regional Liberals are not just delivering at a federal level; the WA Liberal Party has preselected for this upcoming state election some great candidates to continue the representation of regional Western Australia. Geraldton is the largest city in WA north of Perth and has been well represented for last eight years by Liberal local member, Ian Blayney. Mr Blayney is a former farmer who has called the Midwest home for some 50 years, so clearly knows a thing or two about the challenges and opportunities in regional Western Australia. Mr Blayney has overseen an overhaul of the education system in Geraldton. Geraldton Universities Centre has expanded courtesy of funding for the upgrade secured by Mr Blayney. Both public high schools, Geraldton Senior College and John Willcock College, will reopen as full campus high schools for years 7 to 12 from 2019. The member for Geraldton also presided over the opening of the Wandina Primary School, which was Geraldton's first public primary school in over 30 years.

Mr Blayney has committed to an upgrade of the Geraldton regional hospital, following the previous Labor government's ridiculous redevelopment of the hospital which had fewer beds than the campus it replaced. The upgrade commitment includes increasing bed capacity by over 40 per cent and increasing the ED bays to 21. The election promise also includes a \$49 million integrated mental health service, which includes 12 inpatient beds, which is music to the ears of not just Geraldton residents but people right across the Mid West.

The Geraldton hospital upgrade will also benefit people in the neighbouring electorate of Moore, for which the enthusiastic and hard-working Darren Slyn is the candidate for the Liberal Party. Following 20 years in the police force and 15 years with the Army Reserve, and also being a small businessman, Mr Slyn is running for the seat of Moore, fighting to ensure communities in Moore are a safe place to live and to do business.

In the Kimberley, the WA regional Liberals have another fine former police officer and businessman in Warren Greateorex. As a proud Derby man, he knows firsthand about the challenges of Indigenous Australians and will make a fine representative for the Kimberley.

Mark Alchin is a young husband and father who knows what is required to get the Pilbara economy 'pumping' again, and is putting up an excellent fight against the National Party's \$5 mining tax, together with agriculture minister Mark Lewis, and Ken Baston, both Liberal Party mining and pastoral upper house members.

Julie Westcott, who is a proud Gascoyne woman, will ensure the region gets what it needs to take the Gascoyne to the next level. And Bill Crabtree, a local Wheatbelt farmer whose enthusiasm for the Wheatbelt is unmatched, rounds off the excellent WA regional Liberals contesting this state election in the federal seat of Durack.

So, as you can see, the WA regional Liberal team are not just a typical bunch of MPs. We have business people, Indigenous leaders, police officers, Army Reserve people, and people who have been living and breathing regional Western Australia for over 50 years, in many of their cases. So they are a hardworking, diverse, unified team, who deliver currently, in terms of many of my federal colleagues who I mentioned earlier. But we also have a greater capacity, at a state level, to have a greater number of regional Liberals representing regional Western Australia, and I, for one, am very confident that we will have more success this time around, and I look forward to working with each and every one of them.

Homelessness

Housing Affordability

Dr ALY (Cowan) (19:40): Every Australian deserves a safe, welcoming home, but, unfortunately, not every Australian has one. As this government should know, access to housing is not just a promise that can be left to fall by the wayside, overlooked as being of marginal importance, especially when it is of such significance to individual and collective wellbeing.

Ever since the coalition took government in 2013, housing has been under threat. With this government's refusal to tackle negative gearing, affordable housing has got even further out of reach. Not only that—the coalition has failed to secure the future of the National Partnership Agreement on Homelessness, which was established in 2009 by Labor. The coalition has failed to commit to long-term, forward-thinking funding of this agreement, under which the

federal government works together with the states to protect people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness, like women and children who face domestic violence.

When it established the agreement, Labor committed to four years of funding. Since the expiry of that four-year term, the coalition has made four extensions to the agreement: three one-year extensions and one two-year extension. Service providers in my electorate tell me that this piecemeal commitment simply is not good enough. It means that, almost every year, support services that do enormous good for the Australian community are left wondering whether they are going to be able to help Australians any longer or whether their funding will simply be slashed as a misguided budget repair exercise. NPAH housing support programs in WA have been shown to be effective, and independent research undertaken after its first year of operation demonstrated that the programs helped at-risk tenants to retain their housing, and assisted others to access stable housing.

Homelessness hurts Australia. It strips dignity from people who are forced to sleep rough because they have nowhere else to go. It endangers LGBTI youth who fear that their parents will kick them out of home because of their sexual orientation. The threat of being homeless and having nowhere to go scares vulnerable women into staying with abusive partners—and I should know, because, once upon a time, I was one of those women. It is a punishment for those who have committed no crime, and, in situations involving domestic abuse, even those who have been victims of crime.

It is more than just homeless Australians who are hurt by the current crisis of housing affordability. The looming spectre of losing one's home is a severe burden on all Australians, but especially on those on the lowest incomes. The WA economic downturn is placing particular stress on families seeking to retain or purchase housing. At December 2015, there were 20,127 households on the waiting list for public and/or community housing in Western Australia.

The Australian government has just released its annual report on government services, and volume G of that report lists some key statistics on housing and homelessness. Approximately 43 per cent of low income households in WA were in rental stress, spending more than 30 per cent of their income on housing. In 2013 and 2014, only 31 out of every 1,000 homes sold or built were affordable to low- or moderate-income earners. In 2016, 81 per cent of Commonwealth Rent Assistance recipients in WA paid enough rent to be eligible for the maximum CRA. Forty-seven per cent of CRA recipients were in rental stress, paying more than 30 per cent of income on rent, and 60 per cent of recipients under 24 were also in rental stress.

I understand that there is no easy solution to housing affordability and homelessness in this country. But when things are this difficult for Australians, in the time it takes us to work towards a durable answer, we must err on the side of compassion.

I am tired of hearing that the coalition governments, whether state or federal, need to be cruel in order to run this country. I am tired of the cuts. I am tired of them being silent on penalty rates. And I think that the Australian people are sick and tired of hearing it too. And when the moment comes that Australians evaluate those governments' performance, whether it is on 11 March in Western Australia, or whenever this federal government's disunity causes it to splinter and lose control of this House, I think the coalition will get what it so richly deserves.

Grey Electorate: Nonning Outback Ball

Mr RAMSEY (Grey—Government Whip) (19:45): On the weekend I had the pleasure of attending the Nonning Outback Ball, staged by the Gawler Ranges Progress Association. The Gawler Ranges are a stunning range featuring spectacular granite outcrops, permanent waterholes, sometimes with waterfalls, and beautiful arid grazing plains stretching from Iron Knob to Wirrulla—a distance of about 300 kilometres on the north of South Australia's Eyre Peninsula. Opened up to the pastoral industry in the mid-1800s, it has for 160 years produced super-high-quality merino wool and sheep meats. Over the years, the local properties have provided hundreds of jobs and, while worker numbers are now fewer, the properties are operated at a high level of efficiency and contribute to the national economy. There are about 10 of these historic family based pastoral properties operating in the area and there is the wonderful Gawler Ranges National Park as well.

Outback communities love coming together and they love working together for a common cause and, as with many other outback communities, the common cause for the Gawler Ranges Progress Association is the Royal Flying Doctor Service, a service very near and dear to the heart of regional and outback Australia and one, incidentally, that I have used myself. Most years they run two events: the annual gymkhana and the outback ball. They have worked hard to provide a fabulous venue, assisted in the beginning in no small way by those great philanthropists of the outback, Ken and Val Lamb, formerly of Olympic Dam Transporters, in the construction of their facilities. An open, airy shed with a clean concrete floor, a veranda for music and dancing, and spacious, if basic, kitchen and bar facilities, it provides a great atmosphere.

Two hundred people attended Saturday night, dressed to the nines, and were very appreciative of the efforts of the organising committee of Ian and Kat Morris, Fiona Fagan, John McMahon, Angus McTaggart, Michelle and Phil Lord, Bill and Sarah Filmer, the wonderfully enthusiastic Barb Woolford, Anthony and Deb Burge and Jae Ellis. They presented a beautifully decorated venue and entertainment with a terrific program. And they are not without helpers, but more of that in a minute

On Saturday night, President Ian Morris presented the RFDS with a cheque for \$12,000, being the proceeds of last year's gymkhana and ball, and the news gets even better: \$13,000 was raised from the ball on Saturday night, with \$8000 being raised in a charity auction and \$3,000 from the yabby race. How about that! Watch out for the Melbourne Cup, I would suggest! For the record, the winning yabby, named by its temporary owners, was 'Red Dirt and Rangers'. I think there were few redheads on that table. As an indication of the intent of the attending crowd, they donated their \$950 winnings back to the Flying Doctor. Entertainment was provided by Adelaide band Keep the Change and there was a fabulous dinner by Lisa McIntosh and Amy Marshall from the Epicurean Tuckerbox, based on Gum Creek Station in the equally fabulous Flinders Ranges.

But I will return to some of the helpers—and I think this is an interesting part of the story. I come from Kimba, about 80 kilometres to the south in farming lands. When I was a young man, the Gawler Ranges and Kimba communities were quite separate. We knew each other but we really did not come into regular contact. However, as the two communities have shrunk and mobility has increased, we have reached out for each other and embraced in warm

and vigorous friendship—first with a couple of young blokes coming down to play football but then increasingly to access services like the school and other sporting clubs.

It has been very rewarding for both communities and has led to workers like Pedro and Jennifer Martin, Sid and Cheryl Larwood and Bert and Barb Woolford being great workers for the ball, the gymkhana or both. And there are other great supporters like Gadj and Meagan Lienert from Lienert Engineering in Kimba, who not only were on hand to help with the construction of the new extension to the kitchen area but also donated over \$4,000 worth of goods for the auction. There are many others like Yenning Contractors and the fabulous support from Johnny McMahon Earthmoving. There are too many to mention and I apologise for those I have missed. But let me tell you: this is a very special relationship between the Kimba and Gawler Ranges communities. Well done them—and, for the Fling Doctor, it's a marriage made in heaven.

Workplace Relations

Mr DANBY (Melbourne Ports) (19:49): There are thousands in my electorate who are going to be hurt by the scrapping of Sunday penalty rates. One member of my electorate told me that the government was sending out the message: 'Its tax cuts for big business and pay cuts for barista's'. While some in small businesses in Melbourne Ports will support these cuts for casual workers from 200 per cent on a Sunday to 150 per cent and the cuts for full-time and part-time workers in the fast-food industry from 175 per cent to 150 per cent, many will not because of the effect on the disposable income of the large student population working casual jobs, who are going to have their disposable income reduced.

According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, of the top five industries in terms of employment in my electorate, the hospitality and retail industries come in at fourth and fifth, with a combined total of 17 per cent of those employed in the electorate of Melbourne Ports coming from these industries. With the Australian Electoral Commission showing that there are 100,000 voters in my electorate, this means that 15,000 people in my electorate are directly affected by the Fair Work Commission decision—a decision which they would regard as anything but fair. According to the 2011 census, Melbourne Ports is amongst the top 10 most affected electorates to be impacted by this decision to cut Sunday pay rates. Given the large numbers of my constituents impacted by this decision, it is not surprising that many young people are disappointed that, aside from Labor, no other major party made a submission to the Fair Work Commission arguing that penalty rates be left as they were.

Over the weekend, people in my electorate I spoke to raised real concerns about other industries also losing their Sunday penalty rates—nurses and transport workers, all with legitimate concerns that they could be next. That includes retail and food workers currently protected on EBAs in supermarket chains who may be protected at the moment—but who knows for how long that will be the case. There is talk in the media of some of these large chains using the Fair Work decision to alter their bids in the next round of bargaining on these EBAs. Neither the Fair Work Commission nor the government can explain why on Sunday a retail or hospitality worker is somehow less valuable than anyone else from any other industry. The McKell Institute released a report that points out that these penalty rate changes will also exacerbate the gender pay gap, with 55 per cent of those affected being female. The McKell Institute also reports that the changes will impact future EBA negotiations because they signal 'an economy-wide devaluation of Sunday penalty rates' and may serve to

undermine future collective bargaining. This is widely expected to be the case in many of the mass retail chains.

The Leader of the Opposition—the member for Maribyrnong and my friend—said:

Malcolm Turnbull and his ministers campaigned for cuts to penalty rates ...

The Prime Minister can't even summon up a bit of sympathy for these people—

who have had their Sunday rates of pay cut—

As far as he's concerned, they are just numbers on a spreadsheet.

These people have bills to pay and families to support—and every single one has less money in their pocket as a result of this dreadful decision.

The opposition and the Leader of the Opposition will continue to campaign for the 700,000 Australians who are dreadfully affected by these decisions.

I say this in the context of the extraordinary few weeks of parliament that we have seen, with the Prime Minister attacking the Leader of the Opposition on his record as a moderate union leader. I have found some of the expressions by people on that side, about the Leader of the Opposition 'sticking his feet under the tables of billionaires', to be the most incredible cant and hypocrisy, as if the people on that side, and the Prime Minister in particular, have something against all of the billionaires that the Prime Minister mentioned and do not mix with them—as any leader of this country naturally does when they are trying to see that business in Australia operates in accordance with the laws of Australia, employment is engendered and all of these kinds of things. We have the hypocrisy of those opposite attacking the Leader of the Opposition over knowing people in business, as if the Prime Minister does not know any rich people, while at the same time coming in here and flaying us for opposing these cuts to the Sunday penalty rates of ordinary people. We are going to continue on and we are not going to be fazed by the rhetoric over there.

Women and Girls in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics

Mrs SUDMALIS (Gilmore) (19:54): My first career was as a high school science teacher, developing the curriculum and programs to promote science literacy. While there was not a noticeable gender imbalance in the science classroom, there has been a steady decline in overall numbers and the engagement of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics careers, referred to as STEM. Originally, science and maths were compulsory subjects; unfortunately, that changed. The federal government has developed a number of initiatives to help increase the participation of all students in STEM subjects, but particularly projects targeted at girls. One of these is the Curious Minds summer school hosted by the University of New South Wales, where more than 50 girls from across the country share their passion for maths, science, technology and engineering. Throughout the six-month course, the girls have an opportunity to explore all aspects of these subjects in a fun and supportive environment, boosting their confidence and skills, as well as helping them make like-minded friends and connections to set them up for a life filled with science and engineering.

In addition, many of the national employer groups are establishing mentoring and marketing strategies to encourage women to join their ranks. Pocket Sally is such an initiative. A small cardboard cut-out is placed in engineering sites all over NSW, showing that women can do anything and go anywhere. This was developed by the Institute of Public Works Engineering Australia, New South Wales. The strategy involved the young members of this

organisation forming a team to develop the idea. I personally want to encourage young women to be unlimited in their thinking when it comes to their future career options, and Pocket Sally is one highly visual way of promoting that.

Australia is investing more than \$13 million over five years to encourage more women to choose and stay in STEM research, related careers, start-ups and entrepreneurial firms. Recently, I was asked by the Hon. Simon Birmingham, Minister for Education and Training, to launch digIT, a summer school initiative developed by the Australian Mathematics Trust, funded through the Australian government's National Innovation and Science Agenda. The program includes mentoring for the students from ICT professionals to encourage discussions about study options and career pathways. Programs like digIT are critical for this and future generations of all students. Employment trends show that 75 per cent of Australia's fastest-growing careers demand skills in digital literacy, science and technology, engineering or maths. The students come from regional and rural backgrounds. There were lower number of girls participating, which means we need to improve for next year. Since I have been elected, I have had the opportunity to sponsor at least two primary aged female students to attend robotics camps. Bucephalus was helped to sponsor an Australian champion team from Ulladulla High School to go to the USA. Now yet another winning regional group, Team Shuffle, has been assisted to go to England with their innovative project.

We still need to develop processes where girls are given equal opportunities overall, both here and throughout the world. Especially in countries where the educational opportunities are yet to be advanced, we must collectively work on simple, inexpensive strategies that can advantage young women and girls to participate more readily. One such example is the Western Pacific Sanitation Marketing and Innovation Program, more simply known as the Water for Women project, coordinated by WASH. The primary function is to build all-inclusive toilets by encouraging community business and savings enterprise to bring communities together. This enables girls to attend schools safely and is a catalyst for social growth.

Amazing changes for a girl's education can be gained with this type of project, and then we can encourage participation in STEM more generally. As we celebrate the International Day of Women and Girls in Science, which was 11 February, we must also focus on enabling access to basic education as a resource for all girls, so they can become educated women and advance their nations in the long term. While this is a stepping stone to acknowledge the contribution women make to science, technology, engineering and mathematics, it is also important to acknowledge that only one in four IT graduates and fewer than one in eight engineering graduates are women. Less than one-fifth of senior researchers at research institutes and Australian universities are women and the science, technology, engineering and mathematics workforce overall is only one-quarter women.

In December, the coalition government announced the first STEM projects to be funded through the women in STEM and entrepreneurship grants program. The 24 projects will receive \$3.9 million over the next two years and be rolled out across Australia, including in regional areas. These activities will include drone programming camps for girls, engineering skills development for women in regional areas and workshops to boost women's entrepreneurship. These are remarkable initiatives and are a way of encouraging women and

girls to look beyond the usual stereotypes, become industry leaders and know that they are more than capable of becoming the flowering product of STEM.

House adjourned at 20:00

NOTICES

The following notices were given:

Mr Shorten: to present a Bill for an Act to amend the *Fair Work Act 2009*, and for related purposes. (*Fair Work Amendment (Protecting Take Home Pay) Bill 2017*)

Mr Bandt: to present a Bill for an Act to amend the *Fair Work Act 2009*, and for related purposes. (*Fair Work Amendment (Protecting Weekend Pay and Penalty Rates) Bill 2017*)

Mr C. Kelly: to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

- (a) illicit drugs can cause untold harm in our communities and on our streets; and
- (b) the Government:

- (i) is committed to targeting the supply, demand, and harm caused to our communities by the scourge of illicit drugs; and

- (ii) has made significant investments in our law enforcement agencies to do all they can to keep drugs off our streets;

(2) acknowledges that:

- (a) in the last two years alone, our agencies have detected and intercepted more than 12.5 tonnes of narcotics that have been attempted to be imported into Australia; and

- (b) Australian law enforcement officers continue to confront Australia's drug market and combat the criminal syndicates that peddle illicit drugs; and

- (3) calls on all members of the House to promote greater awareness of the harmful effects of illicit drugs on individuals and communities across Australia and support our law enforcement agencies in keeping drugs off our streets.

Mr Wood: to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that on Friday 28 April 2017 four individuals faced court charged with terrorism offences in relation to a 2016 Christmas Day terror plot to attack Melbourne landmarks;

(2) acknowledges the:

- (a) excellent work being undertaken by Australia's law enforcement and security agencies to keep the community safe, including:

- (i) 61 people charged as a result of 26 counter-terrorism operations around Australia;

- (ii) 38 people convicted of terrorism related offences;

- (iii) 41 people before the courts for terrorism related offences; and

- (iv) 12 major counter terrorism disruption operations in response to potential attack planning in Australia; and

- (b) importance of providing law enforcement agencies with the appropriate powers and resources to disrupt terrorist activity and protect Australians; and

- (3) congratulates the Government for its world leading counter-terrorism strategy, including:

- (a) eight successful tranches of counter-terrorism and national security legislation;
- (b) significant investment of \$1.3 billion to support law enforcement and intelligence agencies to combat terrorism;
- (c) tripling investment in initiatives to counter violent extremism to \$45 million; and
- (d) investment in our law enforcement and security agencies to ensure they have the appropriate powers, skills and resources to fight terrorism.

Mr T. R. Wilson: to move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

- (a) there has been a significant increase in crime in Victoria;
- (b) the latest figures from Victoria's Crime Statistics Agency show that the total number of offences reached 535,826 during the past financial year, an increase of 13.4 per cent, with assaults increasing by 11 per cent, robberies by 14 per cent, and aggravated burglaries by 7 per cent;
- (c) Victorians increasingly feel unsafe in their homes and on their streets;
- (d) the Victorian Government has lost control of the Victorian justice system; and
- (e) Victoria has the most lenient bail laws in the country, a contributing factor in the prevalence of crime; and

(2) calls on the Victorian Government to:

- (a) start taking crime and community safety seriously;
- (b) dramatically strengthen Victoria's bail system;
- (c) fix the crisis in the youth prison network, which has seen unprecedented riots and breakouts; and
- (d) dedicate more resources to community safety and Victoria Police.

Mr van Manen: to move:

That this House:

(1) condemns the Queensland Government for failing the people of Queensland;

(2) notes that:

- (a) Queensland is leading the nation on job losses;
- (b) more than 30,000 jobs have disappeared from Queensland in the last year and almost 40,000 people have given up looking;
- (c) Queensland's participation rate is at a more than 20-year low and more people are giving up looking for work; and
- (d) Queensland is in a jobs crisis and it is clear that the Premier of Queensland has no plan for the future; and

(3) calls on the Queensland Government to end its empty rhetoric on jobs and actually start delivering for the people of Queensland.

Mr van Manen: to move:

That this House:

(1) denounces the Queensland Government's underinvestment in infrastructure throughout the state;

(2) notes that:

- (a) the Queensland Government:

- (i) has savagely cut infrastructure spending in Queensland, sapping confidence and costing jobs; and
- (ii) slashed infrastructure spending by more than \$2 billion in its first year in office;
- (b) over the next four years, infrastructure spending has been cut by almost \$3 billion; and
- (c) the Queensland Government:
 - (i) has not funded one new major infrastructure project in two years in office; and
 - (ii) is more interested in political point scoring than working collaboratively with the Australian Government on new infrastructure projects; and
- (3) calls on the Queensland Government to reverse this concerning trend and deliver infrastructure that the people of Queensland require and the Queensland economy desperately needs.

Ms M. L. Landry: to move:

That this House notes that:

- (1) the Australian coal industry plays a vital role in the creation of jobs and investment in this country, particularly in central Queensland;
- (2) coal-fired power stations have an ongoing role in Australia in ensuring consistent, affordable and safe supply of electricity for all Australians;
- (3) while acknowledging the current and future growth of renewable energy sources in Australia, energy sourced from coal will continue to be a major contributor to our national energy output for the foreseeable future; and
- (4) major resource company directors in Australia have flagged concerns that a lack of ‘energy security’ in Australia would make major minerals and resources projects unviable, deterring future international investment and harming jobs and growth.

Ms Marino: to move:

That this House:

- (1) recognises the work of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) through the ThinkUKnow program, a free, evidence-based cyber safety program, to provide educational presentations to parents, carers and teachers, and students across Australia;
- (2) further recognises that ThinkUKnow is Australia’s first and only nationally delivered crime prevention program that is delivered in partnership with law enforcement and industry;
- (3) thanks the dedicated volunteers and federal, state and territory police forces that have delivered ThinkUKnow presentations to more than 150,000 school students from year three through to year 12; and
- (4) congratulates the Government and the AFP for leading the way by partnering with state and territory police forces, and the private sector, to develop new measures to keep our children safe in the online environment.

Ms Flint: to move:

That this House:

- (1) notes that:
 - (a) there are 2.1 million small businesses in Australia, accounting for 97 per cent of businesses in Australia;
 - (b) the small business sector employs almost five million Australians;
 - (c) Australia’s small businesses are at their best when Australians shop locally;
 - (d) the Government has:

- (i) a plan to cut taxes for Australia's small businesses;
 - (ii) backed small business with access to the \$20,000 instant asset write-off programme;
 - (iii) a plan to increase by 90,000, the number of small businesses to which this programme applies; and
 - (iv) levelled the playing field for small businesses online through changes to GST on purchases from overseas; and
 - (e) small business confidence was at a six-year high in January 2017; and
- (2) calls on all Australians to:
- (a) continue to support Australia's small business sector by shopping locally;
 - (b) use local providers of goods and services—including those online—to drive future job creation, higher wages and better opportunities for Australians;
 - (c) take advantage of changes to Australia's Country of Origin labelling system to buy Australian products; and
 - (d) think local first with every dollar they spend.

Mr Hastie: to move:

That this House:

- (1) recognises the strong historic relationship that exists between Australia and the United States of America;
- (2) acknowledges the Australia, New Zealand, United States Security Treaty, which for the past 65 years has provided for our mutual defence, anchored regional stability, and spurred economic growth;
- (3) notes the many ties that bind our nations together, in areas including:
 - (a) intelligence and law enforcement, where information sharing and coordination are at all-time highs, which has led to the prevention of far more terrorist attacks than have occurred;
 - (b) security cooperation, in which Australia has made valuable contributions in the past 15 years to the United States-led campaigns against terror in Afghanistan, Iraq and across the Middle East, noting as well that the United States Force Posture Initiatives in Australia, launched in 2012, have and will continue to enhance the readiness and interoperability of our militaries;
 - (c) trade, with the Australia-United States Free Trade Agreement in particular having expanded the flow of fair, free, and high-standard trade between our countries for 12 years;
 - (d) investment, recognising that the United States is Australia's largest foreign investor, and the top destination for Australian investment, with mutual investment by the United States and Australia in each other's economies having grown to nearly AUD\$2 trillion; and
 - (e) political engagement, including the frequent exchange of politicians, officials and dignitaries between our nations, recognising in particular that over the last three years alone, the President, Vice President, and half of the President's cabinet has visited Australia, as well as more than 100 congressional delegations and prominent United States governors; and
- (4) affirms that our nations' mutual and long-standing commitment to freedom, democracy and the pursuit of happiness will continue to guide and shape our relationship into the future, through both challenging and prosperous times ahead.

Mr Evans: to move:

That this House:

- (1) recognises that the last two budgets demonstrate the Government's achievements in supporting small businesses;

(2) notes that the Government has delivered:

(a) a Ten Year Enterprise Tax Plan to reduce the tax rate to 27.5 per cent, commencing on 1 July 2016, with the tax rate to progressively reduce to 25 per cent by 1 July 2026, noting that the lower rate will apply to businesses with annual turnover of less than \$10 million from 1 July 2016;

(b) an immediate tax deduction for small businesses when purchasing assets up to \$20,000;

(c) a more than \$4.8 billion reduction in red tape and compliance costs for business;

(d) simplified business activity statement reporting requirements to reduce compliance costs for small business;

(e) improved access to digital services for small businesses through the rollout and pilot of the Single Touch Payroll system; and

(f) an extension of the unfair contract term provisions to create a level playing field for small businesses when entering standard form contracts;

(3) acknowledges the Government's efforts to boost innovation, open markets and grow businesses through:

(a) delivering the \$1.1 billion National Innovation and Science Agenda, which includes key measures to promote a dynamic culture of entrepreneurship, changes to insolvency reform and access to finance;

(b) signing new trade agreements with Korea, Japan, China and Singapore and committing resources to help small and medium businesses access new export opportunities;

(c) creating an advocate for small business with the appointment of the Australian Small Business and Family Enterprise Ombudsman in March 2016;

(d) strengthening our competition laws to protect small businesses against anticompetitive behaviour and the misuse of market power;

(e) helping small businesses gain greater access to finance through innovative solutions and diverse funding options with the release of the Fintech statement; and

(f) making it easier for small businesses to access Commonwealth procurement opportunities; and

(4) encourages the Government to continue to pursue cutting red tape and compliance costs while implementing a rigorous policy agenda which supports Australian small businesses.

Mr Hill: to move:

That this House:

(1) notes:

(a) that Australian citizenship is precious and the community must have confidence that the *Australian Citizenship Act 2007* is administered fairly, impartially and with integrity;

(b) that the law provides that Australian citizenship by conferral is available to everyone who meets the legislated criteria, regardless of visa class; and

(c) the enormous, inexplicable and unconscionable delays by the Department of Immigration and Border Protection in processing thousands of citizenship applications;

(2) acknowledges the devastating impact of delays and uncertainty on affected people, whose lives are in limbo, whose mental health is suffering, who are often unable to travel and who have been separated from their family for many years;

(3) notes the Federal Court of Australia in *BMF v Minister for Immigration and Border Protection [2016]* case which:

(a) found that there had been unreasonable delays in the department's processing of citizenship applications of two men on protection visas who had been waiting 18 months and 23 months, respectively;

(b) received evidence from the Minister for Immigration and Border Protection that more than 10,000 applications requiring 'further assessment' were outstanding as of July 2016, yet only 12 officers in the department were even trained to assess these applications; and

(c) noted that the evidence provided suggested that something beyond resourcing of the citizenship program had caused very significant delays, and that the possibility of applications being ordered by reference to an 'unreasonable rationale' could not be excluded; and

(4) calls on the Government to:

(a) admit to and apologise for these delays;

(b) take immediate action to process the full backlog of citizenship applications this year; and

(c) publicly assure affected people and the wider community that the citizenship function will be administered fairly, impartially and expeditiously in the future.

Mr Evans: to move:

That this House:

(1) acknowledges the ongoing work of the Australian Federal Police (AFP) in the Pacific to keep our region safe and support our neighbours;

(2) recognises the Australian Government and the AFP's commitment to supporting our neighbour, Papua New Guinea (PNG), and the capacity building of the Royal PNG Constabulary;

(3) congratulates the Australian Government for announcing in January 2017 the extension of the PNG-Australia Policing Partnership with 73 AFP personnel assisting PNG in planning for the 2018 Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation forum; and

(4) recognises that the:

(a) increasingly transnational nature of crime, including illegal movement of drugs, weapons and people, highlights the importance of cooperation between Australia and PNG; and

(b) Australian and PNG governments share an important and enduring relationship, which will be further strengthened through this investment in law enforcement.

Mr L. S. O'Brien: to move:

That this House:

(1) acknowledges the findings of the Royal Commission into Trade Union Governance and Corruption, which found 'widespread and deep-seated' misconduct by union officials;

(2) recognises the outstanding work of the Trade Union Joint Police Taskforce (Taskforce) in New South Wales, Queensland, Victoria and the Australian Capital Territory, which are investigating 34 referrals of alleged criminal breaches from the Royal Commission;

(3) calls on the Queensland Government to overturn the decision to withdraw from participating in the Taskforce; and

(4) condemns the Queensland Government and Australian Labor Party for putting their union mates before Queensland's lowest paid and most vulnerable workers.

Ms Husar: to move:

That this House acknowledges that:

(1) the 40th anniversary of the Granville train disaster took place on 18 January 2017; and

(2) this is the worst rail disaster in the history of this country.

Monday, 27 February 2017

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Coulton) took the chair at 10:30.

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Centrelink

Ms KATE ELLIS (Adelaide) (10:30): I rise today to outline yet another example of the manner in which this government has treated the Australian population with utter contempt, and I talk about the Centrelink debt debacle which we have seen over recent months. There have been many examples cited in this House and many cited in the media of Australians who have been treated appallingly by a government that should have known better and, when they were told what was happening, could have displayed a little bit of heart and a little bit of compassion and could have stood up and admitted that, in this case, they absolutely got it wrong.

Sadly, Adelaide is no different to the rest of the country, where we have many, many victims. I am sure every member of this parliament would have heard from really distressed members of their local communities, particularly in the lead-up to the Christmas, who were all of a sudden contacted and told that, in some cases, they had massive debts. They were not aware of these debts and questioned them but, all of a sudden, they were being forced to repay them. My office has been no difference, and we have heard from many, many local residents.

At first, Centrelink was forcing clients into a repayment scheme before having their review done to see if they even owed the money to begin with. The minister has, belatedly and finally, changed this so that clients do not have to enter a repayment scheme until after they have had a review of their debt. It has been extremely stressful for clients. They were given two choices: they could have their payments cut or reduced with repayments for a debt that they most likely do not even own.

Many of my local constituents received letters just before Christmas. They had been planning and had set aside money for their children or grandchildren's presents and all of a sudden they were being hit with these debt notices. There were constituents who waited for hours trying to get hold of Centrelink to speak to someone about their debt, only to be told that they had to put through a review online. Many of these constituents are elderly clients who do not have the internet at home. When visiting local Centrelink offices they were given the same referral to the online system—which I guess is just one step up from the social media contacts that Centrelink was sending out, just referring people to Lifeline because they knew the impact it was having.

These are real people, and they have been really badly affected as a result of this government. There are many examples of this. Ashley, who lives in Enfield in my electorate, said, 'In my discussion with Centrelink, I felt bullied and under considerable duress to agree to the payment plan even though I maintained Centrelink's calculations are not correct.' That is just one example. It is not good enough. Labor will continue to fight for these residents.

Migration Settlement Services

Mr ANDREWS (Menzies) (10:33): The front page of today's Melbourne *Herald Sun* newspaper reveals the latest tragedy in relation to the Apex gangs in Victoria, with a headline that says 'Apex killed my son'. Unfortunately and tragically, hardly a week goes by in Melbourne now without news about some outrage involving youth gangs. We saw the outrageous event at the Moomba festival and, more recently, we saw the youth stampede at the Summersault festival in Caroline Springs. We have seen police warn families and people attending the White Night event to be on their guard in relation to these activities. And, unfortunately, they continue.

There are three things which I suggest need to be addressed. First, we have had a policy for more than a decade now in Victoria of soft policing. Under at least two, if not three, chief commissioners of police, this has been the approach of the Victoria Police Force. There is obviously a place for community policing. I know in my electorate there are wonderful activities carried out by the police force in relation to the community. But, equally, there is a place for a strong and resolute reaction when you are dealing with groups of young people for whom any sense of authority is simply not known to them.

Secondly, there needs to be some change to the bail laws in Victoria. Undercurrent bail laws in Australia, section 4 of the bail act states:

Any person accused of an offence and being held in custody in relation to that offence shall be granted bail—

Not may be granted bail, not may apply for bail; the presumption here is in favour of the person being charged and, as the section says, shall be granted bail. That is the law which applies to the bail justices in Victoria, and I suggest that, if we are going to effectively deal with gangs of the like that we have got in the state, a change is required.

Finally, we need to look again at settlement services. As many in this place would know, a decade ago, I warned about this and I said that, if settlement services do not keep up to date with what is happening in relation to new immigrants coming from various communities to Australia, then we will have problems on our hands.

A decade ago, I was ridiculed in some quarters for saying that and that this was not appropriate. Ten years later, the reality is that it has continued. Had we taken heed of that warning then, then some of the problems we are facing now in Victoria might have been avoided. However, in any event, these matters have to be addressed otherwise this will continue terrorise people in Victoria.

Herbert Electorate: Water Security

Ms O'TOOLE (Herbert) (10:36): I rise in this place today to speak about a very important issue for the electorate of Herbert, and that is water security. The Ross River Dam, which was actually built as a flood mitigation strategy, is not a dam and is now at 17 per cent. We are on level 3 water restrictions and, for the largest city in northern Australia, that is simply unacceptable.

This situation is unacceptable as the Burdekin Falls Dam is approximately 130 kilometres down the road. This was built by the Hawke Labor government as a result of strong local representation by the last federal Labor member for Herbert, Ted Lindsay. The Burdekin Falls Dam is five times the size of Sydney Harbour.

Addressing water security for Townsville is key to our future growth and development, it is key to industry investment and key to population growth. And, after 20 years of LNP representation and inaction in Herbert, we still do not have any further action on water security.

On the 16 November 2016, the Townsville City Council began pumping water from the Burdekin Falls Dam as the city's water supply had dropped below the 15 per cent trigger point. Pumping water costs the council approximately \$27,000 a day to send the water along the Houghton pipeline and into the Ross River Dam. It is the first time the pump has been used in 10 years. It was last used in 2006 when the dam level dropped below five per cent; this was during the Howard government. Ten years on, under the Turnbull government, Townsville is still pumping water from the Burdekin Falls Dam and still there is no water security plan for Townsville from the federal government.

It is important to understand that, even with the pumping, between 20 and 40 megalitres of the 130 megalitres pumped will be lost through evaporation at very low dam levels, meaning the level of the Ross River Dam will continue to fall. The city will still need water restrictions in place until it rains to see us through the drought.

The Turnbull government has announced around \$500 million for a water infrastructure fund, which is in fact a concessional loan scheme. The Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Water Resources is constantly boasting about the fact that he is committed to building water infrastructure, and still nothing for Townsville. Just last week, he visited Townsville and still not a mention of a commitment to water security.

I am here to pick up where Ted Lindsay left off, and that is to send a very loud and clear message to the Turnbull government: Townsville does not want your cockatoo service, we do not want your hollow words, we do not want your concessional loans; we want your commitment to fund water security for Townsville.

The total lack of action regarding water security has cost the Townsville economy, local businesses and local jobs. On behalf of the U-Bute Turf Farm, Water for Townsville Action Group, our tourism industry, our local council and, more importantly, the residents of Townsville, I stand here today demanding that the Deputy Prime Minister and Minister for Water Resources takes immediate and real action to address water security for the people of Townsville.

Chisholm Electorate: Leadership Awards

Ms BANKS (Chisholm) (10:39): The month of February is the month of new beginnings for many children in Chisholm—going from kinder to primary school and indeed from grade 5 to grade 6 or to year 7 in secondary school. Even advancing to the next year level can provide leadership opportunities such as class captain. I had the pleasure and honour of attending many local schools to award school leadership badges and certificates in the last few weeks, first at Mont Albert Primary School. Under the leadership of Mr Jason Walker, the school principal, the students gathered excitedly for their first whole-of-school assembly for the year, which meant it was the first assembly for all the prep students, who had spent the prior week learning the words—both verses!—of our national anthem. These students bellowed out the words of the national anthem together with the older kids on a sunny February morning. It was the quintessential Australian primary school moment. The

excitement did not end there but rather a number of leadership awards were made after a quick Q&A session of what leadership meant. In this scenario and in answering questions it did warm my heart to see such young Australians ably and confidently describing leadership as meaning 'responsibility', 'making decisions' or 'taking charge to help and fix things'.

On the same day I had the pleasure of attending Pinewood Primary School's leadership ceremony as led by Principal Karen Jenkin. Music, flags and a march into the assembly hall gave the event a real sense of occasion as parents and friends, with iPhones and cameras in tow, took photos of what undoubtedly always will be a very proud moment for them. The students were full of excitement and anticipation, and there was a wonderful rendition of our national anthem, which included the background beat of a didgeridoo. The event was indeed harnessed by the presence of proud parents, grandparents and special people who all enjoyed a lovely afternoon tea together. I could see from the faces of every individual child who came up and accepted their badge from me that this was indeed an exciting day for them.

Then—between running for divisions—I had the pleasure of hosting Mt Waverley Secondary College students in the nation's capital at Parliament House. We talked about the leadership of our country by our Prime Minister Malcolm Turnbull and his team and the workings of Parliament House. I look forward to going to Essex Heights Primary School and meeting the principal, Mr Andrew Crossett, and staff and students to present their leadership awards.

These events are heart-warming and truly enjoyable. The most inspiring element is how these young students take on the role of leadership so early in their lives and with such passion and energy. Of course leadership does not necessarily come naturally. Rather, students learn what they live with their parents and teachers, so I thank the school communities around Chisholm for providing these opportunities to these young Australians.

Isaacs Electorate: Broadband

Mr DREYFUS (Isaacs—Deputy Manager of Opposition Business) (10:42): I have campaigned for many years on the poor quality of broadband in many parts of the great electorate of Isaacs. I have written to the Minister for Communications, Senator Fifield, and to the previous Minister for Communications, who is now the Prime Minister, Mr Turnbull, on many occasions about the delayed and downgraded NBN in my electorate but I have only received letters of response that are full of vagaries and bluff rather than any coherent plan. I would like to recount just a couple of the stories that I have been told by constituents of mine and by constituents in the neighbouring electorate of Dunkley, where many local residents have felt so let down by the government on the NBN that they have bypassed their local Liberal member and contacted me. I wish that I had good news for them.

I was recently contacted by a group of residents in Keys Road, Keysborough. These residents live in homes that were marked for the NBN but then disappeared off the NBN rollout map. Their download speeds are as low as three megabytes per second, and that makes it impossible to conduct business online or for school age residents of the street to properly study. I wrote again to Senator Fifield on behalf of these residents but received the usual nonresponse that demonstrated just how little this government cares about or even understands the need for high-speed broadband.

Another nearby resident contacted me recently. He lives just outside my electorate, in the seat of Dunkley, and he had read in the local paper, the *Frankston Times*, that the NBN rollout to his home is now delayed until 2019. This Dunkley resident recalled how in 2013 then communications minister Mr Turnbull said that every house in Australia would have access to a world-class NBN by 2016, and then, that promise broken, the Prime Minister came to Dunkley in 2015 to announce that all premises in Dunkley would be connected by 2017. The resident rightly said: if this government broke its promises about him getting access to the NBN by 2016 and by 2017, why should he believe them when they say 2019? You simply cannot trust the Turnbull government when it comes to the NBN.

This government has downgraded and delayed the NBN again and again. They have overseen Australia's internet speeds dropping from 30th in the world to 60th. They just do not get it. To the students in Aspendale Gardens who cannot get decent enough broadband speeds to study, to businesses in Braeside and Carrum Downs who are struggling to compete without the promised NBN, and to my constituents who have been ripped off and lied to by this government again and again, I say that I get it and Labor gets it: Isaacs needs a world-class NBN, not a delayed copper 'fraudband'.

McMillan Electorate: West Gippsland Arts Centre

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (10:45): One thing you can trust the Turnbull government on is to deliver for local communities. Gippsland's regional arts network has received a significant boost with confirmation the coalition government—the Turnbull government—will fund the West Gippsland Arts Centre redevelopment. The federal government will contribute \$4 million to the \$13.9 million West Gippsland Arts Centre project, which Baw Baw Shire Council expects will create 220 direct and indirect jobs during construction. The project will increase seating capacity in the main theatre from 460 to 760 seats, and includes upgrades to technical, performer, visitor and administration facilities. The arts centre will complement works already undertaken and underway at the new Latrobe Creative Precinct in Traralgon, the revamped Latrobe Regional Gallery in Morwell and the new Port of Sale Cultural Hub.

I pay tribute to my colleague Darren Chester, who knows how the arts community works across Gippsland. This redevelopment means that visiting acts can come in and use four strategic spots where they can entertain. It is a really good outcome for a community, because Gippsland—unlike Bendigo and Ballarat—is a broad spread of communities. To be able to combine them in the way that has been done really shows that the thinking that has gone into this is very important.

We are only putting \$4 million into this and the community is putting in the rest, but I not only pay tribute to my colleague Darren Chester and the important strategic role he has played in delivering on behalf of the community but also want to thank John Parker and Leane Gooding. They are just two local people who really wanted this upgrade of the arts centre. They came to see me in genuine need and outlined why they needed this \$4 million to complete the funding: to get this over the line and to make it happen. It is great when community people like John and Leane actually take the initiative, come to see their local member, explain their situation, and go through it in a way that supports the arts community. The arts community is not a hidden community—it is out there and it is strong and relevant—but it is great when people like Leane Gooding and John Parker come in and, with no pretence

whatsoever, just lay it out and say: 'This is why we need the \$4 million. How can you deliver it, Russell?' Well, with the help of Darren Chester, we have been able to deliver this for the community. It will be really good. Having been calling myself a former bishop—having played the part of the bishop in *Les Misérables* in our own local community—I know how much benefit the people will get out of this minor funding. It is minor funding, but it is not minor for the community.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Buchholz): I thank Your Eminence for that contribution!

Northern Tasmania: Health Care

Mr HART (Bass) (10:48): Deputy Speaker, I cannot top that! I rise today to speak about the health-care system in northern Tasmania. I also wish to acknowledge the achievement of a northern Tasmanian institution, which is St.LukesHealth. The organisation is a non-profit, members' own private health insurer established in Launceston in 1952. It has a proud focus on customer service and serving its communities. That focus on customer service was recently recognised by Roy Morgan Research in its 2016 Customer Satisfaction Awards. Notwithstanding that St.LukesHealth is tiny by comparison to large players in private health insurance, it was recognised as the leader in private health insurance nationwide for 2016. It was awarded the title of Private Health Insurer of the Year, based upon 12 months of data from Roy Morgan's consumer single source survey. I think it is significant that this award was won by a mutual—a customer owned—organisation. It is also significant, in my view, that the award was given to an organisation with a culture of supporting communities within which it operates—something that many organisations, large and small, strive to achieve with varying success.

I congratulate St.LukesHealth, its board, management, staff and members, for having achieved so much as a small organisation, competing with very large organisations in a heavily contested space. Nevertheless, notwithstanding the fantastic efforts in customer service of St.LukesHealth, serving its members in all states and territories of Australia, there are some significant constraints within my electorate with access to private health care.

It is acknowledged that the private health-care system and private health insurance plays a role in supporting the public sector—in particular, the public health system. Labor strongly believes and affirms the importance of a public universal health system. There is much material to suggest, including recently released data, that the public health system, across the various jurisdictions, is under significant stress. I would say that the stress is a product of underinvestment in our public health system, whilst the present government claims increased investment in public health and our public health-care system.

The problem is, of course, that the present Liberal government, whilst promising increased investment, highlights the fact that it is spending more money but not keeping pace with health-care inflation or increased demand. Health-care inflation and increased demand, whether just from increased populations or increased acuity, means that unless funding is increased to address those issues the system will go backwards.

In many markets those who have private health insurance are able to access a fully functioning private alternative, thereby fulfilling the object of taking pressure off the public system. There are many regional markets within Australia where private health-care availability is at marginal levels with limited access to, for example, birthing services,

emergency services or more comprehensive surgical and medical services. Northern Tasmania has recently lost its access to services for maternity services, for postnatal care, with the closure of the St Vincent's postnatal unit in Launceston.

Migration

Mr TIM WILSON (Goldstein) (10:51): One of the core guiding principles that led me into this place is a central tenet of liberalism: that all people are born with equal dignity and that the law and society must respect each person's individual worth.

That is why I was disturbed to hear of a recent report that Hurstville Boys Campus of Georges River College recently considered it acceptable to advise female visitors that some young men may not shake their hands, because of their interpretation of their Muslim faith. Worse is that spokespeople for an Islamic community organisation rationalised violence against women, though I acknowledge that, thankfully, they later retracted those comments and clarified their remarks.

Let us not beat around the bush. The vast majority of people who come from across the seas to our great country do so because they want to share in our way of life. That is why they leave their homeland and gamble their future. They know that what we offer—as imperfect as our liberal democracy may be—is to provide the best opportunity for every individual to fulfil their dreams, and what we offer is better than any of the other alternatives. It is only a select few who feel otherwise.

That is why I strongly support a non-discriminatory immigration policy. One of the great virtues of our nation's recent history is that we are not a closed society. We accept new Australians of all backgrounds so long as they want to write their own positive chapter in the continuing story of our great nation. We accept people seeking asylum based on the legitimacy of their claim and not their method of arrival.

Our ambition is that people do not identify as migrants but that they identify as new Australians. But there is an expectation that comes with identifying as a new Australian: that people will integrate into our culture and way of life and that they will continue down the generations as people come to identify not from another ethnicity or culture but to hold that important title, first, of being Australian.

Faith informs people's world view and it is important, and we should respect it. But respect goes both ways. That requires children be raised to understand that they must treat others with respect. There must be mutual respect. When one person treats another person differently for an unjust reason, we traditionally have a word for it. It is called bullying. Mutual respect requires the need to come together and recognise our common humanity, not isolate and exclude others based on irrelevant factors. At the heart of the success of modern Australia is that all people should be treated equally in the law, and we have a society and culture that prioritises that mutual respect.

I cannot understand how we can advance this important cause when we have public institutions guiding the next generation to feel otherwise. One of the great hopes I have and knowledge that I carry, in coming to this place, is that the people of Goldstein strongly agree with me. I hope that all other members share that sentiment as well.

Kingston Electorate: Christmas Appeal

Ms RISHWORTH (Kingston) (10:54): Today I rise to acknowledge the huge effort of my local community and to thank those that donated to our local Christmas appeal. Over the Christmas period, my office acted as a drop-off point for donations designed to help families in need at Christmas time, which can be a difficult time of year. In the months leading up to Christmas, my office was filled with donations of toys, gifts, food, toiletries and animal food. There were so many kind and thoughtful donations that brightened the Christmas morning for many struggling families—toys for young children, such as brand-new bicycles and handmade stuffed animals, gifts for mums and dads such as new bottles of perfume and 'Best Ever Dad' mugs. There were also incredible amounts of food donated that would help to make the Christmas period a bit easier for families who may not have been able to put food on the table. It was not forgotten by the community that Christmas is also a difficult time for many animals, and a huge amount of animal food and other items were donated so that we could help the RSPCA.

Each day during the appeal, my staff and I continued to be overwhelmed by the thoughtfulness of so many in our local community. I want to sincerely thank all of those who contributed, in particular the individuals and families who brought in donations. Many of these people were not well-off themselves but gave what they could to help those less fortunate.

I also want to mention a number of community groups and businesses who rallied together and donated. These included the Noarlunga SES, Goodstart Early Learning Child Care Centre in Young Street at Sheidow Park, Woodend Children's Centre, Southern Montessori School, the 50 plus Activity Club, Morphett Vale Tennis Club, Hallett Cove Chemplus and the Oasis Family Church. The efforts of these organisations were also astounding. Just to give the House an example, the families and staff from Woodend Children's Centre beautifully wrapped gifts for children so that they could open a surprise on Christmas morning. The Noarlunga SES not only donated toys but also donated hundreds of dollars of gift vouchers that went to families with older children, who may have wanted something special. The children's council at Southern Montessori School organised and coordinated hundreds of donations from students and families. This was an enormous effort, and I would like to thank those that also support people in need: Anglicare, The Vines Uniting Church, St Vincent de Paul Society, Noarlunga Centre, Junction Australia and the RSPCA Australia. These are organisations that I was able to partner with to ensure that we made those in our community's Christmas a little bit brighter. Thank you to everyone. It was a great success.

Bennelong Electorate: Schools

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (10:58): The jobs of the 21st century will require study in science, technology, engineering and mathematics, otherwise known as STEM subjects. That is why I have commissioned the inaugural 2017 Bennelong Schools' STEM Challenge, sponsored by Medtronic, as part of the Bennelong Innovation Fair. The winners will get an all-expenses-paid trip to Parliament House to show off their good work in the Great Hall. I can report that local schools in Bennelong have jumped at the challenge.

I had the pleasure of attending Melrose Park Public School last week, a school participating in the STEM challenge, to encourage them and also to see their impressive study programs, which include project based learning. Hosted by principal Clare Kristensen and teachers

Jennie Spencley and Pam Grover, I also met their excellent student leaders and year 5-6 science and technology students. Guided by Arjun Bhagotra, Cooper Roche, Ashlyn Gange and Hanna Park, I also met fellow students Ryan Slender, Leticia Downes, Jye Davies, Aniela Sheehy, Nadege Cayzac Cruise and Emma Ralla. These extraordinary students are a credit to their school and community. Additionally, I organised for participating STEM-challenge schools to visit the 3M company's innovation centre. 3M have their Australian headquarters in Bannellong and are a ubiquitous global leader in high-tech, high-knowledge consumer applications. They are one of the most innovative companies in Australia, with thousands of inventions and patents to their name.

However, among these thousands of ideas, they are perhaps best known for an accidental invention, Post-it Notes. This was a result of a failure in trying to invent an adhesive that was much stronger. Their innovation attitude delivered the bright reminder notes that sometimes litter our desks crying out to be noticed and actioned. Thank you, 3M.

Students, teachers and parents from schools including St Charles Catholic Primary School, Carlingford High School, Ermington West Public School, Melrose Park Public School and Marsden High School were genuinely dazzled and inspired by what they experienced during their visit. The passion of students accompanying teachers was wonderful to behold. Teachers such as Amy Whitfield, John Wallace, Jaimee Hutchens, Shannan Judge and Mini Matthews are a credit to their schools and their essential profession. Thank you to Balbir Blassey of 3M for hosting the school visit.

I would like to close with my thanks to Schools STEM Challenge sponsor Medtronic. The diversified medical device manufacturer, led by managing director Jamie Stanistreet, have opened up their hearts and corporate headquarters to our local schools, agreeing to host the final exhibition, where we will judge the winners. This campus styled new head office is perfect for such an occasion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Buchholz): I thank the honourable member for that contribution. In accordance with standing order 193, the time for members' constituency statement has now concluded.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

Victoria: Rail

Ms McGOWAN (Indi) (11:01): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) for more than eight years, regional communities in northeast Victoria have been frustrated by significant engineering failings on the Wodonga-Melbourne rail line;

(b) in 2016 the trains were on time 79.7 per cent of the time, with the rate dropping to 55.2 per cent in November, the train now takes half an hour longer to get from Southern Cross to Albury than 10 years ago;

(c) the Australian Rail Track Corporation (ARTC) maintains that it is meeting performance obligations under the terms of the 44 year lease agreement with the Victorian Government and under its charter;

(d) the ARTC has spent \$134 million on remediation works that have not improved passenger rail services, with trains regularly slowed or replaced by buses; and

(e) the current arrangements are not meeting the need for reliable passenger rail services, instead regional communities are viewed as freight corridors; and

(2) calls on the Australian Government:

(a) as the sole shareholder of the ARTC, to update the ARTC Statement of Corporate Intent to ensure that passenger services and the transport needs of regional communities are considered core business;

(b) to direct the ARTC to release and review the current agreement between the ARTC and the Victorian Government for the Wodonga-Melbourne rail line, giving due consideration to the passenger rail services and the transport needs of regional communities; and

(c) to develop a long-term plan for passenger rail services that meets the economic, social and environmental needs of regional Australia.

Those of my colleagues who know northeast Victoria probably do not know that we have a really serious problem with our train service. It is the Melbourne to Albury train line, and we have had this problem for quite some time. The problem has two parts: the line is run by the Australian Rail Track Corporation, owned and operated by and reporting to the Commonwealth government, and the trains on it are operated by V/Line, which is a Victorian government corporation. I am coming to this parliament today—and I am so pleased to see the member for Murray here as well—to put it firmly in the court of the Commonwealth to take some action to fix this problem. It has been going on for far too long.

So what is the problem? When it was first reported that in November 2016 only 55.2 per cent of services ran on time, this was the least reliable of all services across Victoria, but that was, in fact, the fifth consecutive month where the North East line was the least reliable in the state. I am told—and these statistics come from Public Transport Victoria—that, as of 1 January 2017, only 94.6 per cent of the services that leave Melbourne actually arrive in Albury-Wodonga, and that is the lowest in the state. Only 65.1 per cent of services on the line were on time, and this is the second lowest in the state. So the train is not arriving or, when it does, it is late. So we have a whole lot of associated problems.

I just want to talk about what that looks like in real terms for real people. I have a letter, and I would like to read some of it briefly into the *Hansard*. This letter is from Irene Grant, who is the chair of the Ovens Murray Regional Partnership group, which is a group formed by the Victorian government to provide some priority around what issues need to be faced. Irene, on behalf of the community, has rung me up, visited me and written to me, and she says:

Dear Cathy—I write to you in my capacity as Chair of the Ovens Murray Regional Partnership committee. The committee includes community representation, CEOs from seven Local Government Areas, as well as representation from State Government Agencies in the region.

Our group has identified key development priorities—that need to be dealt with for the future.

Passenger Rail Transport is "top of mind" for our community with much needed improvements in infrastructure and service delivery already identified in the 2016 Regional Network Development Plan and the North East Border Rail Group Economic Cost Analysis—

which I will come to in a minute.

... Ovens Murray has the least reliable ... rail service in ... Victoria (possibly Australia!) ... I urge you as our Federal member to advocate on behalf of our community to improve rail service delivery—

in the northeast. So the top community leader for northeast Victoria is saying, 'Please act.'

I would like to reinforce this with a letter from John Dunstan, who is a member of our wonderful local Border Rail Action Group, BRAG. His work in bringing attention to this matter, along with the work of the two Bills, has contributed enormously to the community. John says: 'Given the ARTC's refusal to disclose any information on the extent of the temporary speed restrictions, you may like to use the fact, when you are talking in parliament today, that there are 23 sections of the track—Albury to Melbourne—with speed restrictions.' That means that, because of the condition of the railway line, the trains have to go slower. Therefore, they are obviously going to be late. He says that this is a record over the last two years of monitoring. He also says that this is in spite of the completion of a \$130 million ballast rehabilitation program. So we have a problem. ARTC have put a huge amount of money in. The service is not improving. It is still running late. What to do about this?

The responsibility comes back to the Commonwealth government. The Australian Rail Track Corporation has only one shareholder, and that is our minister, the Minister for Infrastructure and Transport, the member for Gippsland, Darren Chester. He is the only shareholder of the ARTC. So this problem comes back fairly and squarely to the minister to deal with. He has said that he will visit, and I think that is a fantastic achievement. We look forward to you visiting, Minister. But when you come you must come with an answer. Coming and looking at the problem will not be enough for the communities. You must come with an answer to what needs to be done.

Having said that, the problem does not lie only with the Commonwealth. The contract between the Victorian government, V/Line, and ARTC was due for renewal in 2014. The then Brumby government recontracted with ARTC for a whopping 45 more years of service. We do not know what the conditions of that contract were, but that is 45 more years of a contract that is not even working well. So there is a real problem here for the Victorian government and Public Transport Victoria, PTV. What are they going to do? This problem gets played out in our local press. We get the Victorian government saying, 'It is up to the Commonwealth,' and the Commonwealth says: 'Yes, we are meeting our contractual obligations. This is a problem for the Victorian government.' Neither of them is claiming responsibility. I have come to parliament today to say to the Commonwealth and the Victorian governments: this is not an argument we need to have in public. Can you please sit down with our local community and do what needs to be done?

What needs to be done? We have fantastic local community groups who have got together, including BRAG, who I have acknowledged already. Also, local government have just commissioned a report called the 'Hume Corridor Passenger Rail Study', in which they have made clear recommendations on what needs to be done to get this happening in the future. This problem does not exist in isolation from the community, the Victorian government and the Commonwealth government sitting down together and saying, 'Let's sort it out.' From the community's perspective, we would like some transparency in what is going on. We really would like to know what the contractual obligations are. We really would like to know what the long-term plans for ARTC are. Clearly they know they have got a problem. They do not like the fact that the trains are late and that the community is constantly complaining about it. We know that the ARTC wants to solve the problem. I am absolutely convinced that the government wants to solve the problem; it cannot want this level of dysfunction. I am sure the Victorian government wants much better service.

In its budget last year the Victorian government committed \$17 million to this particular line—\$2 million for planning and \$15 million for infrastructure. That was \$17 million more than we have ever had from the Victorian government, so it was welcome. When I speak to the Victorian minister, I say: that \$2 million was for planning so that, in the budget this year, you deliver the goods. We have a couple of months for the Commonwealth government, the state government and the community to come together and come up with a long-term strategy to address the short-term problems and the issues in the medium term and long term.

In bringing my comments to a close, I want to talk about the opportunities. Public transport is alive and well. It is well used. There is enormous potential to grow it. The community of Victoria want to use the train. We do not like using the bus, for a whole lot of reasons. We want to use the train. So the opportunity is there. We know that if the service were better more people would use it. My office is constantly bombarded with the problems when things go wrong. Clearly we want to fix it up, so I say to the people in my electorate: the will is there to fix it up; what we need to do now is get the Commonwealth government, the state government and the community groups sitting around the table and working out what we can do.

I want to talk about the opportunity that I have got at the moment. One of the great fans of transport in north-east Victoria is Tim Fischer. Tim Fischer has been involved in trains forever and has been a great fan of high-speed rail and the inland freight route, which I know is going to be really important. I was talking to Tim yesterday, and he said that, this year, on 17 October, we are celebrating 100 years since the signing of the contract to set up the first east-west transcontinental link. The Commonwealth government, 100 years ago, signed a commitment to look at that transcontinental connection. Surely, with 100 years behind us, this is the year for the Commonwealth to take the lead role and to work with the state government and the community to give us the assurance that we are going to fix up our train line.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Buchholz): Is the motion seconded?

Ms Rishworth: I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mr DRUM (Murray) (11:11): It is great to have the opportunity to stand in the parliament and talk about infrastructure—in particular, rail infrastructure and, in particular, northern Victorian rail infrastructure. I was a member of the Victorian parliament for 14 years, and I have seen various governments invest in rail to varying degrees. One of the great things about investing in rail is that it is very much 'build it and they will come'. Improvement of living standards for our people in the regions relies very heavily on an ability to connect them with their capitals and connect them with other regional cities. Rail certainly has an amazing opportunity to take vehicles off the road and to improve the livability of regional Australia.

The member for Indi moved this motion and mentioned that \$17 million has been on the table from the Victorian government for rail upgrades. She mentioned that this was the biggest amount that she can remember. The member for Indi would realise that at the election in 2014 the coalition had \$178 million on the table for projects in regional Victoria, of which the Wangaratta-Albury line and the Shepparton line were going to be the major recipients. Yet the member for Indi happily seems to forget these investments in rail that were put on the table and were promised to the people of north-eastern and northern Victoria. It was promised that a minimum of \$178 million would be spent on upgrades for passenger rail. The member for Indi says that this pathetic \$17 million is somehow or other a significant investment in

regional rail. The member for Indi has to stop being a Labor Party apologist and call this total neglect of regional rail by the Victorian government for what it is, and that is a disgraceful neglect.

The motion talks about the ARTC and its performance obligations. These are set under an arrangement with the Victorian government which sets such things as the amount of time before trains are cancelled and how late they can be and still be counted as being on time—you can be five or 10 minutes late and still be classified as being on time. All those obligations, all those performance targets, are set under an arrangement with the state. Again, it is the Victorian Labor Party that is responsible for these arrangements.

It would also be worthwhile if the member for Indi realised that the interstate XPT service is rarely criticised for being late, because it uses modern rolling stock on that line to achieve reasonable outcomes. It is the pathetic, old, long-haul rolling stock that the Victorian government dishes out to the people of Wangaratta, Benalla and Wodonga that is in large part leading to these disgraceful performance objectives.

There has been an enormous amount of issues. Steph Ryan, the member for Euroa in the Victorian parliament has been pushing this issue for many years—since she arrived in the parliament, taking over from Bill Sykes. Yes, it is true: \$134 million has been put into a ballast rehabilitation program—specifically targeted at the mud holes that the soils along that north-east line tend to create. Every time we seem to have a wet winter or a wet spring, the mud holes created on that line need significant attention. And in the previous couple of years we have had exactly that problem. But that \$134 million has been spent and, hopefully, it will lead to some improvements in the performance objectives.

However, we are not going to see serious improvements in these time lines until we get a stricter performance obligation set down under the agreement with the Victorian government and we get some new rolling stock on that line—certainly, in the same light that we have new, efficient VLocity trains going to Gippsland, Geelong, Ballarat and Bendigo, all seats that seemed to be given much more precedent than the north-east line and the Shepparton line collectively.

I want to turn my attention to the Shepparton line because whilst I am the local member for Violet Town, Euroa, just north of Seymour and just south of Benalla, about 100 kilometres of that line is in my electorate. What is an even greater worry is the fact that the city of Greater Shepparton, which has well over 50,000 people, is only 27 kilometres further away from Melbourne than is the City of Bendigo, where I lived for the previous 15 years. There, I was able to enjoy an hourly service to and from Melbourne for the last 10 years. To be 12 minutes in train travel further away than another regional city in Victoria and yet only to have a quarter of the services that are available seems to be a gross injustice.

The people of Shepparton need to be treated with a little more respect. I understand, again, talking to Steph Ryan, the member for Euroa, that the Victorian transport minister, Jacinta Allan, will not even go to Shepparton or Benalla to talk to many of these travellers who are having to put up with these substandard services. As I said, in Bendigo there are 20 train services a day, and in Shepparton—only 27 kilometres further away from the Melbourne CBD—there are four services a day, and the fourth one has only just been added.

For Wodonga to Melbourne there are three V/line trains, two buses and two XPT interstate trains. It is pathetic to look at the contrast in services. And whilst I know that Minister Chester has taken up Steph Ryan's invitation to travel on the north-east line—and I know that he is very committed to doing what he can as the federal Minister for Infrastructure and Transport—the member for Indi and I both know that this is predominantly a Victorian government issue. The arrangement with ARTC is an arrangement with the Victorian government. All of those performance obligations are under a lease agreement with the Victorian government and its charter.

I think we need to be loud on this. I appreciate the fact that the member for Indi has found her voice in relation to this issue. It is a significant issue: it is a significant issue of disadvantage and it is a significant issue of inequality. I cannot understand how the Labor Party in Victoria accepts the fact that we have such inequality. We have a decent train service across from Gippsland through Ballarat, Bendigo, Warrnambool and Geelong, with regular services but, all of a sudden, when you get to Wodonga, Wangaratta, Benalla and Shepparton it is very, very poor indeed.

I acknowledge the member for Indi for having put up this motion. I would like to have seen her be a little more critical of the Labor Party every now and again, because she understands exactly who has the total responsibility for this issue. Certainly this has the opportunity to really grow some significant regional cities, mainly Wangaratta and Wodonga, and Albury in New South Wales. A vastly improved, efficient and timely service into Melbourne would do enormous things for Shepparton and I am sure it would do enormous things for significant towns in her electorate. This is very much an issue that once you build the service, people will opt to get out of their cars, leave their cars at home and find their way to Melbourne for professional appointments, medical appointments and sporting and cultural events. They will truly be able to enjoy life and improve their amenity if they could only have a decent and significant rail connection through to their capital city. I thank the member for Indi for putting this on the *Notice Paper* so that we have the opportunity to talk about a significant issue in the seat of Murray.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Buchholz): The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

EU-Australia Leadership Forum

Mr WALLACE (Fisher) (11:22): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

(a) the 'EU-Australia Leadership Forum' was launched by Minister Bishop at Parliament House on 18 October 2016 following the European Union in Brussels, presented by Minister Bishop and European Union High Representative Federica Mogherini on 8 September 2016;

(b) the Forum will bring together a broad representation of talented individuals in government, business, academic and civil society from both Australia and the European Union to discuss common challenges and opportunities;

(c) Australia and the European Union are liberal democracies that share unwavering commitment to the rule of law and open markets to secure peace and prosperity for their citizens; and

(d) the Australian Government intends to encourage closer economic cooperation with the European Union through the negotiation of a European Union-Australia Free Trade Agreement; and

(2) welcomes these positive developments in the European Union-Australia relationship.

The personal links between Australia and the European Union are deep-rooted and profound. Over the past two centuries, from every corner of Europe, immigrants have come to Australia and contributed to our culture and our way of life. Just as important have been the Australians who have journeyed to Europe and returned. From the First Australian Imperial Force to the backpackers who travel today for work and new experiences, Australians have visited Europe and forged links between our continents that will never be forgotten.

Today, our respective peoples share a fundamental commitment to core values. The nations that gave us the Magna Carta, the Enlightenment and the Geneva Conventions believe unswervingly, as we do, in democracy, freedom and the rule of law. In the future, in this ever-increasingly uncertain world, close cooperation between Australia and the European Union is going to be critical to our security and our prosperity. According to the Institute of Studies on Conflicts and Humanitarian Action, the combined military resources of the European Union represent the second-most-powerful armed force on earth, while its combined GDP is more than US\$16 trillion. As was demonstrated last year in the release of the new Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy for the European Union, the member states of the union use and will continue to use this power and influence in the pursuit of objectives that are closely aligned to our own.

In the fight to defeat Daesh and prevent international terrorism, we work together through Europol and the Australia-Europe Counter Terrorism Dialogue. We cooperate as part of the anti-Daesh coalition and in the International Syria Support Group. In opposing Russia's expansionist actions in recent years, Australia and the European Union have been united in condemnation and in the imposition of sanctions. Closer to Australia, in the South China Sea, the European Union has added its considerable weight to our own calls for all parties to resolve their disputes by peaceful negotiation, while on North Korea the EU has led in seeking strong sanctions to restrain that country's aggressive and dangerous nuclear weapons program.

In economics, the EU is already our second-largest trading partner and the single largest source of foreign investment into our country. At a time when, in some parts of the world, there is an emerging sense of disillusionment with globalisation and an enthusiasm for protectionism, the continent of Adam Smith remains committed to the building of prosperity for all through liberalised international trade. With 500 million people, political stability and US\$16 trillion in GDP, this will always be a market that Australian businesses want the best possible access to.

This government recognises the critical importance of the EU-Australia partnership to our future and has taken active steps to create ever-closer links. The Minister for Foreign Affairs should be commended by the House for her work in driving forward this agenda and building the strong relationships we need with the EU decision makers.

The EU-Australia Leadership Forum is just such a relationship-building initiative. Great ideas come from collaboration. By working together and sharing and developing our visions at an early stage, we can diversify and intensify our partnership with the EU. That is what this initiative will achieve. The project is unique among the EU's diplomatic activities. No

government other than ours has forged this link. It is generously funded by the European Union, with a grant of nearly \$3 million. Over the next three years, the EUALF will bring together key European and Australian leaders from government and opposition, business, media, education and civil society to provide input and ideas on growing our relationships in the future. The project's multi-stakeholder steering committee has already met for the first time, while the first meeting of the full forum will take place in Sydney between 2 and 6 June this year.

This government also has the foresight to recognise the importance of the next generation in continuing this ongoing work. That is why the project includes a second stream: the Emerging Leaders' Forum. This will bring together young and energetic professionals, MPs, academics and policymakers from both Australia and Europe to engage in discussions around the future of the EU-Australia relationship. They will contribute their ideas and recommendations to the Senior Leaders' Forum. The government should be commended for this successful, ongoing work.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Buchholz): I thank the member for that contribution. Is the motion seconded?

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (11:27): I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (11:27): The relationship between Australia and the European Union is long, strong and well established. The EU-Australia Leadership Forum will build on the hard work that has already gone into building and sustaining the bilateral relationship that has gone before. One of the first formal bilateral agreements—it is kind of weird calling it a bilateral agreement, given it is between a multilateral outfit and a nation—entered into by the EU and Australia was a joint declaration on relations in 1997. The declaration was based on principles of flexibility, practicality and mutual interest. A new agreement called the Australia-EU Partnership Framework was developed in 2008 and focused on practical cooperation in the areas of foreign and security policy interests, the trade-investment relationship, the Asia-Pacific region, climate change, science and innovation, education, culture and facilitating the movement of people. This framework was in place for more than 10 years and sustained the relationship between the EU and Australia.

In 2015, the government signed the Australia-EU Framework Agreement along with the Australia-EU Crisis Management Agreement. The framework agreement formalises the existing relationship and the previous agreement from 2008 in a formal treaty-level agreement. The Australia-EU Crisis Management Agreement formalises the existing framework for Australia's participation in EU crisis management operations. Australia is already a willing participant in some of the EU's activities. We have provided Australian personnel to support the EU's maritime operations in the Horn of Africa and the Indian Ocean.

Based on the treaty-level agreements and the longer term bilateral relationship between the EU and Australia, the EU-Australia Leadership Forum will only serve to strengthen these existing ties. The core of the leadership forum is the EU-Australia Senior Leaders' Forum—a high-level event that will be held annually, alternating between Australia one year and Europe the next. The senior leaders forum brings together European and Australian leaders from a variety of policy areas to provide input and ideas to diversity and develop the relationship further in key areas.

One of the security areas that I expect to gather interest and momentum in the leadership forum is cybersecurity. As we heard from the previous member, it is not just the senior leaders who will be meeting to discuss issues but the emerging leaders as well, and I am hoping that the discussion at both those fora will highlight the fact that we have to have an ongoing deep and meaningful discussion on cybersecurity, particularly cybercrime. While experts in international law grapple with the constructs of jurisdiction and how the state should respond to cyber operations against it, particularly how it should respond against non-state actors, what we are seeing is that not every cyber activity will be a significant attack aimed at destroying or damaging infrastructure. As an increasing number of sectors and industries move their operations and data online, the risk that key information could be accessed and exposed or held to ransom is a global risk. How different governments and business sectors respond to the risk—the detection and response frameworks they put in place—is becoming an important consideration for the globalised trading and investment environment.

These types of cybercrime activities—access, exposure, and sale and ransom of information—are not necessarily state controlled but can be undertaken by an individual or organisation or a non-state actor. Where this occurs, the usual response options the state has available to it may not apply. The crime may be a domestic crime but not an international crime. So how can the issue of justice apply in these areas? It is very, very complex, Deputy Speaker. Just last week I was at the launch of the *Tallinn Manual 2.0*, doing a broad examination of the legal framework and environment that we are working in with regard to cyber and trying to work out where international law applies, where domestic law applies and where the gaps exist. It is incredibly challenging, and some of the world's greatest international legal minds have been put to that task.

The first emerging leaders forum will be held in June this year in Sydney. I understand there is a competitive process for people to apply to be part of the forum and I encourage many of our young policy professionals here in Canberra to apply and be part of this exciting new program. Applications close on 12 March—so there is not much time—and further information can be found at the EU-Australia Leadership Forum website. Canberrans, if you want to engage in multilateral policy discussion on cybersecurity, sign up.

Mr FALINSKI (Mackellar) (11:32): We live in a world of ideas. Ideas are the things that drive our modern economies. And exchange of ideas is the thing that is most critical to ensuring that our economy moves forward and grows at a rate that all people can enjoy and take part in. It is incredibly important that the European Union has granted us \$2 million to run a dialogue amongst our leaders and emerging leaders about the importance of what will be our future and their future, for there is much that we can learn from the European Union and there is much that we can do together.

Talking, in short, is important. Talking to Europeans is even more important than talking to other nationalities, mostly because so much of what we do in this country actually comes from Europe. Whether it be our legal system, our understanding of the economy or how we interact with our citizens, it is important that we understand that many of the basic concepts that we employ here in Australia originated in Europe. To borrow a line from Monty Python: what have the Romans ever done for us? Whether it be thinking around things like federation, subsidiarity, the role of the state, product integrity or privacy in the digital age, all are lessons

that the European Union has been exploring for over 50 to 60 years. All are concepts that we can bring here to Australia to make sure that we create a more perfect nation.

Look at the concept of federation. I understand that the European Union is not a formal federation, but it employs concepts like subsidiarity, where decisions are made at the best level of government you can make them. For example, you should make decisions at a local government level about who picks up your garbage, but at an international level you may want to talk about things like monetary policy, global economics and, indeed, trade policy. This understanding, and the mistakes that the European Union has made, are important ideas that our leaders and emerging leaders can enjoy at these conferences.

It is fantastic that the first workshop is on digital transformation in government. So much of what we are seeing both here and around the world is a sense that people in democracies are feeling that they cannot quite connect to their government. The obvious answer to this is digital transformation—putting more information up on the internet for people not only to receive but also to interact with and make a contribution to. This government has started that process with its open data policy. We have taken 500 datasets that existed before we were elected and turned them into 23,600 datasets. The importance of open data cannot be underestimated. In New South Wales alone, it has helped save tens of millions of dollars in public housing, ensuring that scarce public resources are being directed to those people who need them and to programs that do the most to help people who need housing. This is not something that can be applied only to public housing. In the United Kingdom, for example, open data allowed citizens to find out that the department of defence was spending 175 pounds per mop and that there were better and more cost-effective ways to supply the military with mops.

The EU has been the crucible for the most critical idea of the 19th and 20th centuries, which is that free trade reduces war. The European Union was conceived after two world wars. After the First World War, Europeans said, 'We will never ever have another war like this,' and then they did. Free trade and the European Union were their ways of ensuring that it would never happen again. Thomas Friedman said that in the history of the world no two nations with a McDonald's franchise have ever gone to war. In the European Union, the French and the Germans came together, initially over a steel tariff, to trade openly because it would remove the incentive for war. The idea that France and Germany could go to war today is ludicrous but, of course, that is a new concept, something that has really only been conceived in the 21st century.

One is reminded, though, of some of the things that the EU has done badly, like its subsidies for agricultural production. We can learn both good and bad things from the European Union.

Ms VAMVAKINOU (Calwell) (11:37): I rise to participate in this important motion on the EU-Australia Leadership Forum, moved by the member for Fisher. As the chair of the EU parliamentary friendship group, I want to say a few words in support of this major partnership. This partnership between Australia and the European Union at a leadership level is very significant and important because it solidifies the historical bonds between our two continents by broadening and intensifying the bilateral relationships. It is no secret that we are living in challenging times and that the world today is a very different place. Globally, the political landscape is ambiguous, and we are still transcending the post-Cold War period, so

where the world order will end up is probably not clear to any of us. The European Union is a powerhouse of nation states with deeply rooted histories, heavily steeped in culture and learning, and the birthplace of Western civilisation. It is a major player in leading the way forward. In the words of the Canadian Prime Minister, Justin Trudeau: 'The whole world benefits from the European Union, because it is a truly remarkable achievement and an unprecedented model for peaceful cooperation.'

As a country, Australia is geographically isolated. We are a vast nation, much bigger than Europe in land size but with a smaller population. We are rich in resources and our people are our greatest strength—in fact, our greatest resource. Our multicultural make-up allows us to naturally partner with the European Union through the many European migrants who have made Australia their home. The ties that bind the two countries are there, and the EU-Australia Leadership Forum has the potential to strengthen, broaden and diversify these relationships in key areas. Through our liberal democracies and our commitment to the rule of law, Australia and the member states of the European Union can ensure peace for their citizens and instil in them the belief that this partnership will advance their safety and prosperity. And, of course, this latest framework does build on the previous framework of 2008.

This recent initiative is particularly important to me as the federal member for Calwell. I have many established communities in my electorate that are European—both northern and southern Europeans—and, of course, from eastern and central Europe. There are my very strong Greek and Italian communities to Croatian, Serbian, Bosnian, Maltese, Polish, Latvian, Spanish and Lithuanian—to name but a few of the diaspora communities who have settled successfully in Australia and whose children and grandchildren have risen to become leading academics, scientists and businesspeople, and even politicians, in their new country. These communities have created our diversity and have added to our strengths. So in this sense Europe has a lot to learn from Australia, and also a lot to benefit from through its interaction with Australia. We are a creative, diverse, vibrant, young and innovative nation.

Now, while the business end of the relationship is very important, our dialogue with Europe should also cultivate the cultural dimension. Successful trade relationships need to be based on a genuine cultural understanding. So I do hope that the EU-Australia Leadership Forum will focus as much on culture as it will on trade, economic exchange and the other areas of concern. The Australian government's intent to create closer economic cooperation with the European Union through negotiation of a European Union-Australia Free Trade Agreement does raise the possibility of many possibilities. Many of my diaspora European communities are already finding ways of trading with their original homelands, especially in niche Australian product markets. So any assistance for them is very important, and they must and should be the beneficiaries of such a free trade agreement.

This agreement will see Australian businesses become more competitive on a global scale. Our economy, of course, stands to succeed on an international scale and with the Global Strategy on Foreign and Security Policy for the European Union, Australia is set to benefit a great deal from its focus on the Asia-Pacific region. I have always maintained that Australia has a crucial bridging role to play in Euro-Asian relations. Modern Australia, historically, is a European society while geographically very much part of Asia. So Australia is ideally placed

as a conduit, because we happen to be European and Asian—with an Indigenous inheritance, of course; we must always remember that.

The forum's focus on working with the European Union to exchange ideas in government, business, academia, creative industries and civil society is fundamental to its success and outcomes. I do look forward to the work of the forum. It is guided by a very impressive steering committee of Australia's and Europe's greatest minds. Over the next three years, the forum will work to develop and exchange ideas and expertise. I am particularly interested in the focus on young people, as they are the leaders of tomorrow. They need to be the ones who embrace new ideas and learn from each other.

Mr ALBANESE (Grayndler) (11:42): The European Union is Australia's second-largest trading partner, and the largest source of foreign investment. All up, the total stock of European investment in Australia is more than \$600 billion. Today, I want to take the opportunity in speaking to this motion to talk particularly about the impact on infrastructure and aviation.

The EU is Australia's largest aviation market. Each year, more than 1.3 million Europeans visit Australia and more than a million Australians travel to Europe. When I was the minister, we signed the EU-Australia horizontal agreement on 29 April 2008. That entered into force in July 2009. This agreement replaced 16 outdated bilateral air services agreements and has allowed Australian and European airlines to offer more flights and a wider range of services at more competitive prices.

We need to continue, though, to work for a comprehensive Australia-EU air services agreement. That has been agreed to in the past, when Minister Tajani was the minister responsible for transport in the European union. He was very supportive of such an agreement. However, the bureaucracy in Brussels seemed to intervene at each stage and that put Australia at a disadvantage. We should continue to push for such a comprehensive agreement. Indeed, we had substantial benefit, I think, from our engagement with the European Union and infrastructure companies.

In November 2012 I hosted a delegation of Italian infrastructure and transport companies. That was led by the Italian Secretary of State, Mr Staffan de Mistura, and it was a very large delegation. They visited parliament here. Companies included Ansa do STES, Thella and Meramec. What we saw after meetings I held in Italy, France and Spain was an increased presence of these European infrastructure companies here in Australia. In some cases that is beneficial simply because it brings competition. In other cases, they bring specific required skills—for example, three is the South Road Super way project in Adelaide, which is an elevated roadway. The Italians, particularly, due to their topography, have an expertise in this. The company Rizzio de Escher was also part of the consortium that built this project. That was, at the time, the biggest project in the state's history and opened in 2013.

Similarly, projects like Legacy Way in Brisbane benefitted from the fact that it was a consortia. BMD Construction, a local Queensland based company working in partnership with Thella from Italy and Action from Spain, built that \$1.5 billion project, which opened in 2014. The Italian industrial group Saline, part of the consortia that are building the elevated sky train section of Sydney's North West Rail Link, and German companies Hochstein and Ballinger Berger have a strong presence here in engineering and construction. And the French company Veolia has established itself, particularly in the water waste and transport sectors.

All of this bring skills and presence here in Australia but, importantly, for our overall economic future I have argued with the European companies that they can use Australia as a base into the Asia-Pacific region, with the certainty that is provided with our legal system, with the lifestyle that comes from senior executives basing themselves here in Australia. It is of great mutual benefit, this relationship between Australia and the European Union, and it should be strengthened into the future.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Claydon): The debate has concluded. The resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Automotive Industry

Mr CHAMPION (Wakefield) (11:48): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that on:

(a) 20 October 2017 General Motors Holden will end automotive production at the Elizabeth plant; and

(b) 3 October 2017 Toyota will end automotive production at the Altona plant; and

(2) acknowledges the devastating impact the end of automotive production in Australia will have on:

(a) workers and their families;

(b) the communities around Elizabeth and Altona;

(c) support industries;

(d) the national economy, and in particular the economies of South Australia and Victoria; and

(e) Australian manufacturing as a whole.

Mr Zappia: I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mr CHAMPION: I have spoken on the demise of automotive manufacturing in this country many times in this House because it is of obvious importance to my electorate, to the state of South Australia and to the national economy. It is worthwhile recounting some of the history of what has occurred here. There was a very good article on 30 November 2013 by Joshua Dowling in *The Advertiser*. He recounted that over the period 2001 to 2012, although Holden received \$1.8 billion in federal funding, in effect, it returned \$1.4 billion of that through pay as you go income tax of its workers. That is just the income tax of the workers at that plant, not counting the other economic effects that are generated: \$21 billion to businesses with other goods and services. Of course it talked about the exports that came out of that factory—out of just Holden alone: its biggest export year was 2008 when 56, 000 cars were shipped mostly to the US when the dollar was 84c. I say this, because the dollar's rise to over parity was one of the key economic reasons why Holden announced its closure. That was the pressing economic effect and that is why they needed additional government assistance at the time. Any government would have looked at the currency and said that clearly it was an issue for manufacturing. It is worthwhile noting that today it is 76c Australian to the US dollar and, but for the actions of this government, we would have been exporting cars to the US, in particular, the US patrol car and US police car market.

What happened after that? The company asked the government for help. Given the currency, given the trading conditions, and what did they get? Well, they got an ultimatum: 'Hockey dares GM to leave.' We know that that was their attitude, that they had set up a

contest of who could be harder within the cabinet room: the Prime Minister at that time and the Treasurer, beating their chests about who could be harder on the car industry.

What devastating consequences have occurred for my state, for my electorate and for the national economy, because we are now looking at the effects of 50,000 direct job losses, thousands more beyond that and supply chains being completely disrupted and destroyed. What we find is that the government has put in place a so-called growth fund of \$155 million in total that has all been spent. So now we find that we are looking at the closure date of October 20 for Holden—slightly earlier, I think, for Toyota—a devastating day for Australian manufacturing as this government de-industrialises the nation. We are going to see terrible and horrible effects in the local economy and tremendous disruption to the South Australian and Victorian economies and, beyond that, to the car part suppliers in New South Wales and even as far away as Queensland and Tasmania in some instances.

An enormous disruption to the national economy that was entirely preventable—this was the consequence of the Abbott-Turnbull policies put in place by, firstly, one Prime Minister and now another. We will hear later from other coalition speakers, Mr Kelly and Mr Christensen, and they will talk about subsidies and all the rest of it; however, I would point out to the House that Mr Kelly once proposed subsidising power for swimming centres. Mr Christensen wanted to see a new wave of economic protectionism with the return of tariff and industry subsidies and has been an outspoken advocate, apparently, of ethanol. I would point out to those members that it is hard to have an ethanol industry, if you do not have an automotive industry in the country. We are now looking down the barrel of tremendous economic hardship and dislocation in South Australia and Victoria, and it has all been because you can sheet every single job loss home to this government—to this government's economic policy and to their incoherence in jobs.

Dr McVEIGH (Groom) (11:53): It is indeed sad for all of us who are supporters of Australian manufacturing to see the closure of the General Motors Holden, Toyota and Ford Motor Company manufacturing activities in Australia. Many economists and commentators, including the member for Wakefield and others in this House on both sides of parliament, have canvassed, in recent years, the international competition, consumer trends, costs of production and other reasons for this decline.

We know that over recent years, through successive governments, this has been a particularly difficult economic reality to deal with for none more so, of course, than those employees of these plants in this country. It has impacted significantly in South Australia, obviously, in Victoria and, if we look back at the history of motor vehicle manufacturing in this country, other states as well over the years, including my state of Queensland.

It is important to note the Australian government is supporting the automotive manufacturing workers, industrial supply chains and traditional manufacturing regions through what is clearly a transition period. One hundred and one million dollars has been invested into the \$155 million Growth Fund to ensure workers in South Australia and Victoria are receiving the support they need. They have the opportunity to reskill, supply chains are diversifying, and regions are adjusting to new areas of the economy. For employees, \$15 million has been committed to extend the Automotive Industry Structural Adjustment Program to help automotive workers find new jobs. It is open until 2018. For automotive supply chains, there is \$20 million for the Automotive Diversification Program to help firms

enter new markets. It is already generating \$51 million in private sector investment. There is the \$90 million Next Generation Manufacturing Investment Program to accelerate private sector investment in high-value manufacturing sectors in Victoria and South Australia. It has generated over \$283 million in investment. For businesses in impacted regions, the \$29.5 million Geelong Region Innovation and Investment Fund and the \$24.5 million Melbourne's North Innovation and Investment Fund support innovation and job creation projects that ultimately strengthen and diversify these regions.

With all of that in mind, I want to share with the chamber my firm view that we all, as consumers in this free, democratic society, are free to make our own purchase decisions. I respect that and I celebrate that as a key principle in our free economy. I personally could regale this chamber with stories of the many vehicles that I have purchased over the last 30-odd years since I got my driver's licence. Suffice it to say that it began with a second-hand Australian-made 1967 six-cylinder Ford Fairlane sedan—my uni car, if you like—and has most recently involved my purchase of a 2015 Ford Falcon just before they went out of production. In my experience, they have been mainly Fords—in between a few Holdens, I must admit. I have always been a great fan and supporter of the Australian automotive product, a bent that not all in our country share, I must admit. I therefore, as a consumer, grieve for the loss of these vehicles to our market. I recognise that the sector has been the basis of engineering innovation across the economy for many years, but times are changing.

We should therefore celebrate the fact that design expertise in these companies is being retained in our country. I cite the Ford Ranger as an example. It is a very popular vehicle in Australia, fully designed here in our country and manufactured in Thailand. We should celebrate the fact that many of our automotive supply chain firms have continued to supply manufacturers around the world and, of course, we should recognise the government's efforts in promoting a defence industry plan that presents design and manufacturing opportunities not just in a few states but right across the country, including in my own regional electorate of Groom in Queensland.

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (11:58): I rise to support this motion and also to say that 20 October this year will be a very sad day for South Australians and all Australians when the closure of Holden's Elizabeth plant in Adelaide's northern suburbs takes place. It will be a terrible blow to South Australia, to the economy and to the expertise of manufacturing in Australia. The plant at Elizabeth has successfully been building cars since 1963, but of course Holden has been in Australia for many years. It was started off as a saddlery business by James Alexander Holden in 1856, and in 1924 the company became the exclusive supplier for manufacturing the US GMH motor vehicles.

Many thousands of people have put bread and butter on the table as blue-collar workers at GMH in South Australia, Victoria and other places. One of those families was my family. My father migrated to Australia in 1954, and the day after he landed in Melbourne he got his first job, at GMH at Fishermans Bend or Port Melbourne, and stayed there for many years before transferring to the Woodville plant in South Australia.

Just like our family benefited from a decent wage for a decent week's work, the families of millions of other people did the same—migrant families, families that had been here for many generations—and it assisted Australia's economy. It assisted our manufacturing, it assisted the techniques and technology and a whole range of other things. It will be a very sad day to see

Holden close its doors. Many of us have grown up with that name. My first car, when I was 16 or 17, was a 1962 EK Holden, and I always had Holdens—mainly because my father worked there and they provided a wage for our family so I wanted to support them, just as many other thousands of Australians did.

Earlier we heard the member for Wakefield talk about the benefits in dollar terms and how much it cost governments to support Holden staying here. We heard that \$1.8 billion was the cost, with a \$1.4 billion return. But then you add the taxation, you add the spinoff enterprises, businesses that all supplied Holden; you add the small delicatessens and snack bars down the road that would shoot up because of the manufacturing population around there. You can see what a great loss this will be to Australia. Countries all around the world subsidise car manufacturing. Wherever there is an assembly plant there is a subsidy per worker. Research that has been done in Germany and in the US shows that our subsidy was one of the lowest per worker, per assembly line, compared to other nations around the world.

Why do nations provide these subsidies? Because they know of the value adding that each assembly line job gives to the economy. They know that for each assembly line job there is a tenfold spinoff into the economy. Therefore it was our duty as members of parliament, as governments, to do everything we possibly could to keep Holden operating and running. I was not in this place when then Treasurer Hockey dared GMH to leave. A year earlier Mr Devereux, who was the CEO of Holden in Australia, made a statement saying how precarious their position was and how the subsidies would assist them to maintain manufacturing, and any tinkering with the subsidies would mean that they would have to shut their doors. Then we heard the negative spin from member after member, and from ministers—it was like a race to who could be most negative about Holden. The front page of the papers had Mr Hockey daring GMH to leave, and within a few days we had the very sad and unfortunate message from Mr Devereux saying that they were going to shut their doors in 2017.

Holden have provided jobs for thousands of people—in fact, economic modelling estimates that overall economic losses to the state will be in the vicinity of \$4 billion, with job losses of up to 65,000 by 2020. It will be a very sad day when they close and I am very disappointed that people in this place did not do everything they possibly could to keep Holden going.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (12:03): I do partly concur with members of the opposition on this motion—it is a sad day when any company closes down, especially a company with such a long and proud history like General Motors Holden in Adelaide. But the reality is that businesses have to be competitive. No business can continue to be subsidised by other businesses indefinitely, because ultimately someone has to pay for that subsidy. If one business wants to be subsidised, you have to put a higher tax on another business, which makes that business less efficient, deters them from expanding and deters them from employing people. The sad reality at the end of the day was that Holden in South Australia was no longer competitive, and that is why the decision to close down was made.

Holden is not the only company we have recently seen close down in South Australia. Only last week we saw that Coca-Cola were closing their operations in South Australia. They had a glass bottle manufacturing plant, a plant that obviously requires tremendous amounts of energy. It was very understandable that, with South Australia's high energy costs, Coca-Cola pulled out. They joined Pfizer, who pulled out of South Australia the week before. And, only a couple of days ago, we had the decision of Caroma to pull out of South Australia. All of us

in this parliament should be very concerned about the exodus of manufacturing from South Australia.

One of the clear reasons for that exodus is the high cost of electricity in that state. It is not only the businesses that we see close down; it is also the unseen—the businesses that would have otherwise started up. Our economy relies on new investments and new business start-ups to keep the economy growing. But who is going to invest in a state that has such high electricity costs, such unreliable power? No business today would make that decision.

Madam Deputy Speaker, to give you some idea of the competitive disadvantage faced in South Australia: recently there was a report released by the Australian Energy Market Commission, looking at the prices in each state, and in New South Wales, for the year 2014-15, the average price of residential electricity was 22c per kilowatt hour, but in South Australia that amount was 30c per kilowatt hour. You had an almost 50 per cent higher price in South Australia than in New South Wales, so is it any wonder that we are seeing this exodus of manufacturing from South Australia?

South Australia not only has a competitive disadvantage within Australia; it also has a disadvantage compared to other countries. I recently had a look at some of the prices in Canada for electricity. In Edmonton, the average price for residential electricity is Can10.3c. The Canadian dollar and the Australian dollar are almost at parity, so you are looking at 10.3c in Edmonton but 30c in South Australia—three times the price. In Vancouver, the average price is 10.7c for electricity. In Calgary it is 10.4c. In Montreal, the average residential price for electricity is 7.23c. That is one quarter of the cost in South Australia.

We have a crisis in this country with electricity costs. We cannot ignore the problems in South Australia to double down on a renewable energy target in South Australia that has caused so much damage. I call on those members from South Australia to realise the crisis that is ahead of you and to call on your party to abandon your 50 per cent renewable energy target, because your state, most of all, cannot afford it.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (12:08): It is clear that the member for Hughes knows nothing about the automotive industry in this country. The decision to close GMH was made in 2013, and even the Productivity Commission's biased report in 2013 did not point to electricity prices as the reason why GMH was going to close. In October, both GMH and Toyota will close their doors in this country in terms of making cars here. Many small and medium enterprises around the country that provide support to the two major car makers will also close their doors. We are talking about anything up to 170 other component companies that will also close. These are the small and medium companies that members opposite constantly try to tell us they stand up for in this place. With the closure of these companies will come the loss of tens of thousands of jobs. We have already seen that begin to occur across Australia. These are the jobs of people who in some cases know nothing else other than working in the auto industry and who have worked there all of their lives. With their job losses will also come the loss of expertise that has been built up over the years as a result of them doing just that.

For South Australia, the closure of the Holden plant will be devastating. I cannot describe it any other way. The Holden plant at Elizabeth has existed for over 50 years—in fact, close to 60 years. It is an iconic building in an iconic location on the Philip Highway. It is a catalyst for other businesses that have come into the area ever since the 1960s—in particular, the development in the last couple of decades of Edinburgh Parks, which is now slowly starting to

shut down because Holden is closing. Again, we see job losses with that. We not only see the job losses but also see a loss of confidence in the area. We have another 1,600 jobs still to go. I have spoken to many of the components suppliers that support Holden in South Australia. Many of them have told me openly: 'When Holden closes its doors, we will do the same. There is no transition. There are no other areas that we can go to.'

South Australia is, indeed, bracing itself for that, at a time when we all know that we have people who are unemployed, have been unemployed for a long time and are looking for work. I personally know people who have lost their jobs at Holden and have tried hard for the last 12 to 18 months to get a job. At times, they have been able to get temporary jobs—unfortunately, in many cases, in other manufacturing industries that, in turn, have closed down, so their jobs are lost again. These are the sorts of people that we need to try and think about.

As the member for Wakefield quite rightly pointed out, this is foolish government ideology that makes no economic sense. There will be a \$7 billion hit to Australia's GDP as a result of the closure of Toyota and Holden. The cost to the government in lost tax revenue and welfare payments far outstrips whatever subsidy the car makers were asking for—subsidies that pale into insignificance when compared with the subsidies provided by other countries to their car manufacturers. Australia was one of 13 countries that could make a car from start to finish. It will now be one of, I think, two countries in the advanced world that do not have a car-making industry in their economy.

What is this government doing to help those auto workers who are going to lose their jobs? Very little. Indeed, the Prime Minister came out to South Australia last year when we had the floods that affected the food growers in the northern parts of Adelaide. He came out there for a media stunt. We have not heard a word or seen anything of him ever since—nothing. Yet that is an industry that could well take up some of the slack in respect of the workers who are going to lose their jobs in the car industry. Only on the weekend, I spoke to a food producer in South Australia who is well known, has a stable business, probably employs close to 100 people and wants to expand. His question is, 'What is the government going to do to help me expand my food-processing business?'

But it goes further than that, because AUSVEG have put together a very clear proposal that the government could embrace if it wanted to do something about helping those people who are going to lose their jobs—a proposal that talks about extending an irrigation scheme, setting up new facilities, fixing up some of the transport problems that we have and investing directly into skills training that the food growers need. Those are the sorts of things that could be done right now by this government if it really wanted to do something to help the people who are going to lose their jobs as a result of this government's incompetence in managing the economy of this country. It was a bad decision then and has been made even worse by the government's failure to act to support those workers.

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson—Chief Nationals Whip) (12:13): The withdrawal of Holden from manufacturing is a tragic thing, particularly for the families of those employed directly by Holden. Holden's withdrawal signals the end of auto manufacturing in Australia, which is also a tragic loss for those employed across the wider industry who might lose their jobs as a result.

It is a blow to diehard Holden fans across the country, my father being one of them—he was a professional dragcar racer for a period of time and raced a HQ Monaro as part of the then Wild Bunch. My first car was a Holden Commodore, and the family is not happy at all that I now drive a Ford Territory. We all love Holden as an Aussie institution, and the loyalty of Holden fans is matched only by the loyalty of Ford fans.

But the reality is that neither Holden nor Ford had that loyalty to Australia. I will leave it up to others to score the political points over Holden's departure. We could talk about Ford's departure under the Gillard government. The reality is that they were all pulling out of Australia under both sides of politics regardless of what shade of government it was. Frankly, it did not matter who was in government or how much money was thrown at them; their intention was always to leave Australia and to go wherever cars could be produced cheaper. That is a problem of globalisation.

The Liberals are firmly committed to free trade, and Labor is on the same line. No doubt free trade does bring some benefits to industry—certainly it does to agriculture, I will acknowledge—but free trade is also a reckoning and falls hard on manufacturing. Australian workers earn decent wages and, when we pit them against workers in a third-world country who may get \$2 a day in some cases if they are lucky, how can we compete? I think the horses have already bolted on this issue not just in the auto industry but right across the manufacturing sector.

And it is not just manufacturing in Australia; this is a problem for developed countries around the world wherever workers are paid a decent wage. The US has seen industrial ruination across their country in places like Detroit, Michigan, and Ohio for the same reason: it is cheaper for large companies to manufacture in second- and third-world countries. A recent *Los Angeles Times* article told the story of an Ohio resident, Chris Wade, who worked for parts manufacturer Delphi Automotive before Delphi moved operations from the US to Mexico. He was paid \$30, a far cry from the \$1 an hour paid to Berta Alicia Lopez, who lives on the outskirts of Juarez, Mexico and performs the same job that Wade once did in Ohio.

Globalisation and free trade, we are told, lift the wages of people in poor countries, but Mexico and America are a perfect example: despite the pain in America, Mexican wages have not improved. That blue-collar pain felt across middle America drove millions of voters to Donald Trump at the 2016 election. At a campaign rally, President Trump said:

Every time I see a Delphi and I see companies leaving, that wall gets a little bit higher, and keeps going up. We are going to fight Delphi and other companies and say, 'Don't leave us, because there are going to be consequences.'

Maybe that is the only way here in Australia we can stop it happening: to stand up against these multinational companies and stand up for our working families.

When Holden first announced they were deserting Australia, I said to them and all the other auto manufacturers that we should demand back all the money that we have paid them instead of falling over one another to see how much more money we could throw at them in the forlorn hope that we would keep them here. We should have passed legislation to recover the billions of dollars that had already been given to them. We should be putting a massive tax on them to recoup the money that we gave them. Perhaps these companies need to feel a big stick every so often.

Whatever the answer might be, it does not involve handing out free money. We tried that, and it just did not work. It did not work under Labor when Ford left. It did not work under us when Holden left. The answer is a different style of leadership: standing up to multinational companies that seek the lowest common denominator for production costs. Perhaps we need to tell these multinationals that, if they want to sell in Australia, they need to manufacture in Australia. When free trade was first championed, it was on the back of so-called 'production efficiency', but that has now gone out the window with the increase in technology and also with the low cost of international shipping. No country has a production efficiency. Now it comes down to the lowest common denominator in wages.

The question does come back, sadly, to Australian consumers, who demand cheap little cars that come out of Thailand and Korea. I do not know the answer to the question of whose fault it ultimately is, but I have to say we Australians do need to start being loyal to Australian products and to Australian companies that support Australia and Australian workers.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Claydon): The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

National Stronger Regions Fund

Ms MARINO (Forrest—Chief Government Whip) (12:19): I move:

That this House:

- (1) congratulates the Government on the success of the National Stronger Regions Fund (NSRF);
- (2) acknowledges the significant and positive impact that the NSRF is having in rural, remote and disadvantaged regions around Australia; and
- (3) notes that the:
 - (a) Government is investing \$66,336,110 in 34 projects around Western Australia under 3 rounds of the NSRF; and
 - (b) NSRF is delivering infrastructure projects to create jobs in regional areas, improve community facilities and support stronger and more sustainable communities across Western Australia.

The National Stronger Regions Fund was established by the coalition government to deliver a \$1 billion investment over five years from 2015-16 to 2019-20. It was designed to help regional communities increase productivity and help build confidence in these communities right across the country. These are the very communities that produce so much of our export wealth, be it from mining or agriculture—natural gas, minerals gold, coal, meat, wool or alumina, right across the board. This is something that Labor has never done. The Turnbull government has absolute confidence in rural and regional communities. We not only acknowledge their current contribution to local, regional, state and national economies but also we know there is continuing potential for regional Australia through new opportunities through the free trade agreements as well. We are practically backing these communities and supporting them as much as possible through this program.

In Western Australia, like other regions all over the country, the government is investing in the future of regional communities, delivering infrastructure projects which help create jobs, improve community facilities and create stronger and more sustainable communities. It is an acknowledgement of their great contribution to this country. The government has invested over \$66 million in 34 projects around Western Australia—a direct, tangible example of how

the Turnbull government is backing regional communities. In my own part of the world, my community has benefited from the third round of the NSRF. Arts Margaret River has benefited from the redevelopment of the arts and business events hub, which will provide venues for arts and cultural performances as well as conferences and business events. This hub is called the HART project; tourism will be involved as well. We will see the redevelopment of the 33-year-old building, and there will be a redevelopment of the 37-year-old squash courts. This is a very exciting upgrade and expansion of the existing facility which will enable many more groups to use the facility. The whole community will be able to enjoy it. This is a very practical outcome. I look forward to attending the graduation ceremonies for the Margaret River Senior High School—a great high school—and even the local small business awards. It will be a multipurpose performance and convention space and expo area that will provide a great spinoff for local businesses.

The government has also invested in the expansion to a freight level of the Busselton-Margaret River Regional Airport, and the state government has also invested in the airport as well. This will lead to an increase in domestic tourism as well through the airport, with possibly an extra 120,000 visitors, which means the opportunities for the arts hub through this investment at the airport are significant. I congratulate the CEO of the Augusta-Margaret River shire, Gary Evershed, and the shire councillors for their commitment to this project. There are some very excited people in that part of the world. It is very important for the community and I do want to acknowledge and pay tribute to the Shire of Augusta-Margaret River and the board of Arts Margaret River for their vision. This fund has been a major success right around the country. When we look at where these projects have practically landed and the difference it is making, we can see that a small amount of money can make a massive difference in small regional communities. There are a great variety of projects, and the one thing they all have in common is that they go to practical outcomes on the ground to assist local communities.

We will also see the Building Better Regions Fund. This fund will also support infrastructure projects and community investment, again creating local jobs, driving local economic growth and helping to build stronger regional communities in the future. I am looking forward to seeing the small community grants part of this program. Very often in these very independent, very self-reliant local communities a small amount of money can make a massive difference. I am proud to be part of a government that shows its commitment to and caring for regional communities and their future. All of my fellow members on this side of the House are very aware of the contribution made by rural and regional Australia.

A division having been called in the House of Representatives—

Sitting suspended from 12:25 to 12:38

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Claydon): Is the motion before the House, the motion moved by the member for Forrest relating to the National Stronger Regions Fund, seconded?

Mr Craig Kelly: I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mr HAMMOND (Perth) (12:38): I thank the member for Forrest for drawing attention to what is a very important issue. I agree with her assessment that the Commonwealth plays a vital role in funding community infrastructure in Western Australian regions. However, with respect to the substance of the motion, I simply cannot agree that it is appropriate in any way,

shape or form to ascribe any success to the government for the role they have played in the rollout of the National Stronger Regions Fund, for reasons I will articulate shortly.

Firstly, let us put to one side the fact that in Western Australia all but one of the grants over the three rounds of the NSRF have gone to Liberal electorates and let us dig a bit further down into that. In Western Australia, in May 2015, round 1, five grants were awarded; in December 2015, round 2, 13 grants were awarded; and in October 2016, round 3, 15 grants were awarded. That adds up to 33 grants in Western Australia in relation to funding regional community infrastructure, and only one of those grants went to a Labor-held federal seat in the state of Western Australia. The only grant to a Labor-held electorate was just shy of \$5 million in round 2 to the City of Rockingham in Brand for the Rockingham Beach foreshore masterplan—and not for want of applications. In round 3, there were applications from the City of Gosnells, Armadale, my fine friend, the member for Burt's electorate as well as an application from the City of Fremantle.

Let's put aside the fact that, in each successive round, the proportion of funding sent to WA projects has only slightly increased, presumably, in a flimsy attempt by the federal party to prop up Colin Barnett's failing state government, falling apart as we speak. Round 1: WA's proportion of the total funding allocated was about 4.9 per cent of total federal funds. Round 2: WA's proportion of that funding was about 12.5 per cent. Round 3: only slightly better—Western Australia's proportion then rising, somewhat coincidentally I do not think, to 15.3 per cent.

As if that wasn't enough, the fact is that many projects funded under the National Stronger Regions Fund, so to speak, are simply not regional, which begs the question: what is the point of trying to pay lip-service to the regions who dearly need the infrastructure support, if that is not where the money is going?

Let's look at this great bastion of regional Western Australia—and that is South Perth. South Perth is perhaps, as the crow flies, three kilometres away from the heart of the central business district: \$2.5 million—the second-biggest grant in Western Australia in round 3 going to the City of South Perth to revitalise the Mends Street Jetty precinct. Don't get me wrong: I am quite happy to disclose, as a former long-term resident of South Perth, that I grew up there and it holds a place very close to my heart; my late father had a business just a stone's throw from the Mends Street Jetty. However, if it is that we are ascribing regional funding to a place such as South Perth, we just wonder what is the entire point of badging this process. However, it goes further than that: it really goes to the heart of the blatant lip-service paid by this government to supposedly propping up the regions. It is just not the case with these funding grants.

Another example of NSRF round 1: \$6 million to the City of Belmont to upgrade traffic and infrastructure around the Belmont Business Park. This is in the same inner-city federal electorate as the Mends Street Jetty. What special powers indeed does the member for Swan have in convincing his ministerial colleagues that he is actually in a regional electorate?

The real question is whether the Liberal Party here is misusing these funds, valuable taxpayer funds, in a desperate attempt to save the member for Swan or if they are desperately trying to sandbag Glenys Godfrey's seat, which she only holds by a matter of one per cent in the seat of Belmont ahead of the 11 March.

Simply put, the National Stronger Regions Fund does not do what it says it does on the label. It is not regional or, if it is, the expansion of the definition is now so wide as to render the term completely meaningless, especially for those in the regions. It is not national. Funding is not granted equitably between states and between regions within the states. It is simply doled out, from what I can tell, according to the Liberal Party's priorities for pork-barrelling. Thirdly, it does not make our regional and outer suburban areas stronger.

We welcome Commonwealth funding. What we do not welcome is a hunger games type arrangement where we have district versus district. The regions are not getting the attention they deserve.

Mr RAMSEY (Grey—Government Whip) (12:43): Madam Deputy Speaker Vamvakinou, I commend my good friend the member for Forrest on this motion and I am sure we will have your indulgence in speaking more about South Australia than perhaps Western Australia. The National Stronger Regions Fund was launched in 2014, and over a billion dollars over three rounds has been pumped into regional Australia.

I would have to say in the first round in Grey, I was disappointed: we did not land any projects. As a result of that, I and my office worked very hard with the proponents following to lift the quality of their applications and I am very pleased to report almost \$25 million has come the way of the Grey electorate in the last two rounds.

In round 2, there were 111 projects Australia wide—\$293 million dollars. There were five in Grey, totalling more than \$15 million and they were all fantastic projects: the Whyalla leisure centre, \$150,000 to add to the council funds for a complete upgrade of the centre including better ventilation, circulation, lowering the humidity in the place and replacing pumps. I was speaking with manager Clare McLaughlin quite recently about the excellent community response to the upgrade, they extra members they have signed up—and the family fun day yesterday attracted more than 400 people.

In Ceduna, out in the west of my electorate, the Thevenard Marine Offloading Facility received support of almost \$5 million—\$4.8 million—and I thank the mayor there, Allan Suter, for his very hard work in bringing this project to fruition, with support from both the council and the state government roughly matching those funds. Over the years, Thevenard has become one of the busiest ports in South Australia, and fishing has been squeezed to one side. This will rejuvenate the fishing industry in Thevenard.

The Port Pirie Regional Sports Precinct received \$5 million from the National Stronger Regions Fund, with matching funds from the state government and roughly similar from the council again, for a multipurpose sporting facility including squash courts, an indoor swimming pool and a dedicated gymnasium—Garry and Lee-ann Nayda, the leaders of the gymnastics group in Port Pirie, are absolutely delighted with that outcome—and repositioning the oval and new lighting to AFL standards.

Barunga nursing homes in Port Broughton are receiving funding of \$990,000. They are the biggest employer in Port Broughton, with more than 100 staff. It is a great industry they have built there, led by Maureen Coffey and Merrilyn Hewett. It is a wonderful facility, and they attract a lot of retired people to the township of Port Broughton.

Also in Ceduna, the Copper Coast Sports & Leisure Centre redevelopment received \$4.8 million from the National Stronger Regions Fund. That was round 2.

In round 3, there were two projects which landed in Grey. One was for \$990,000 to assist with the construction of shellfish reefs near Stansbury-Androssan, at Rogues Point, in Gulf St Vincent. They will construct native shellfish reefs which are pre-seeded with juvenile oysters. The reef footprint will be approximately 20 hectares in size, and they expect to employ 15 people during construction, and nine people post construction. This is a very important tourist precinct for South Australia. Over the years, there have been moves to restrict fishing and, in recent times, closures by the state government. This will help to address those issues of providing fertility back in the sands that are off-coast.

Very importantly, there is an investment in Peterborough of \$8.6 million to support and build a reticulated wastewater management system—from the federal government, \$8.6 million; Peterborough council, \$6½ million; and the LGA, \$2½ million.

I might tell you a little bit about Peterborough, the town, in the time I have left. This is the lowest socioeconomic group in my electorate. At the moment, it exists on individual septic pits and then soakage pits. Because of the economic circumstances of the town, it is very difficult for people there to keep those systems in order, so this has become a first-order health issue. The system needs to be replaced. I have been working with Peterborough council over a number of years, trying to get it on one of the particular programs to get funded, so I cannot tell you how delighted Mayor Ruth Whittle, the council CEO and I were. We were delighted. It will really change things in Peterborough, and it shows a great investment with confidence from the federal government.

Mr KEOGH (Burt) (12:48): Just how disingenuous can this motion possibly be? The member for Forrest has congratulated the Turnbull Liberals on their investment in regional Western Australia, but the figures just do not hold up. The total government spend in the three rounds of the National Stronger Regions Fund was more than \$630 million, and yet Western Australia, the state that takes up over a third of the country, with communities spread far further than in any other state, a state suffering from an economy in recession and a terrible Barnett Liberal government, received just \$66 million from that pool. Maybe that is why the member for Forrest could not find one other Western Australian Liberal to speak in support of her motion here today.

But how has this happened? The answer lies in the nature of the projects funded. Three rounds of this program in WA chart the political course of this failed government. In round one of the program, we saw money flowing to only one suburban area in Perth in need of new infrastructure: Belmont. Then, take a look at round two: round two saw infrastructure funded in only one suburb again, in Rockingham. In round three, the outer suburban funding dries up altogether. This is the National Party's increasing stranglehold on the Abbott-Turnbull government on full display in the budget papers.

I am certainly not arguing the WA's remote and rural towns should not receive funding under this program. Of course, they should and they do. But outer suburban areas are in crisis across the country, particularly in Perth. High unemployment, combined with years of neglect from state and federal Liberal governments, has left existing local infrastructure in a state of disrepair and much-needed new infrastructure is non-existent. Perhaps most amusingly of all in this motion, is that it congratulates the government on a program that is actually being killed off by the Nationals anyway. There is no more National Stronger Regions Fund. It has been replaced by the Building Better Regions Fund. With this, the Turnbull government has

proven once and for all that it does not care about outer suburban areas. But, as always with the Turnbull Liberals, keeping the conservatives inside the party happy takes precedence over all else, including investing funds where they are needed.

When areas in the seat of Canning, a metropolitan seat, were cut out of the program late last year, suddenly there was outrage from WA Liberals. In the Liberal world view, it is fine to cut funding from Armidale—after all, its local MPs, federal and state, are Labor—but when the National Party's knife comes to the suburban areas of Liberal seats there is an outrage. So the Prime Minister steps in and promises to change the rules so that this one metropolitan seat can take part in the program. It is a naked bid to shore up the member for Canning's ever decreasing margin. Though, given today's news reports about the member for Canning's activities with his fellow 'deplorables', the Prime Minister may be regretting that decision. This is apparently the way a good government works: outer suburban areas deserve no investment unless a Liberal seat is at risk.

I am regularly contacted by community groups in my area looking for funding grants from the federal government on infrastructure projects. While other programs exist for small projects, there is nothing that provides the substantial funding opportunities for infrastructure projects that will benefit entire communities. Why should our outer suburbs be put at a disadvantage simply to allow support for the National Party's seats and to support Malcolm Turnbull's prime ministership? So congratulations to the Turnbull Liberal government on your now abolished, pork-barrelling, misguided National Stronger Regions Fund! Congratulations for nothing.

Ms PRICE (Durack) (12:52): Here I am again at the start of another week, highlighting work by the federal government with respect to what it is doing in regional, remote and rural Australia. Like my colleague Nola Marino, I am a WA regional Liberal who gets the bush and represents regional Australia. I am very proud to do so. I am pleased to rise today to speak on the member for Forrest's private members' business, because it gives all of us in this place a great opportunity to hear about the government's track record in regional Australia as compared with those opposite, who do not understand it and do not appreciate regional Australia.

The National Stronger Regions Fund promotes sustainable, robust projects that make a real difference in the lives of those who are living in some of the most rural and remote parts of the country, including in my electorate of Durack. The National Stronger Regions Fund is a multifaceted program with lots of different levers, all of which can be implemented by government and communities to improve regional and outback Australia. Last week, I was in the Pilbara, where the National Stronger Regions Fund is helping to build a world-class arts and community precinct in Karratha and is also restoring the historic Victoria Hotel in Roebourne. When you combine this with the government's funding of the Northern Australia Roads Program, you can clearly see that this side of the House cares for and respects those living in our regions and we want to see them prosper.

When I was in Port Hedland, there was a very serious discussion about the use of the northern Australia infrastructure funds to develop a general cargo handling port in Port Hedland at Lumsden Point. This would allow the northwest live export market to prosper. Currently we have about one million head of cattle in the Kimberley and Pilbara regions, with a strong state government commitment to grow that to two million head. If this is to occur, we

will need a port capable of handling that increase in traffic, as currently many of the cattle are being transported thousands of kilometres to the south to be shipped overseas. This project will cut the distance, time and cost involved in live export from northern Australia and will move our strong agricultural sector forward.

In this government, we get the bush, we get outback Australia and we get northern Australia. The latest round of projects to be funded through the NSRF was announced in October last year. Those projects will have immense value in my electorate of Durack, delivering improved infrastructure and creating jobs but also improving the livability of many of those towns.

The health of residents in Hedland will benefit from the new St John Ambulance Port Hedland training subcentre, which will be a state-of-the-art facility, replacing the existing ageing facility. In addition to being a brand-new facility, the building will cater for an increased need for ambulance services in the area, with improved access to first aid training and equipment—great news for residents of Hedland and the surrounding towns and for the many travellers who travel through Hedland.

The Kimberley region were also winners in the last round, with Kununurra Bushmen's Rodeo Association receiving a grant which will benefit the East Kimberley enormously. The Kununurra Bushmen's Rodeo Association has received over \$319,000 for a major upgrade of the Kununurra Rodeo Grounds, which will open up the town to new tourism opportunities.

In the last round of the National Stronger Regions Fund, I was very proud that Durack got a total of eight projects, and I want to take the time to congratulate the local RDAs, my staff and all of those councils who applied for those funds. Together we have made an awesome team, and that is obvious from the eight projects that we managed to achieve. Let there be no doubt in the minds of regional and rural Australians: this federal government is listening to your needs. To my electorate, I want to confirm—and I think it is obvious from the eight projects we got in the last round—that I am delivering across the breadth of Durack. Together we are delivering, from Kununurra in the north to Southern Cross in the south. Long may we continue to do so.

Dr ALY (Cowan) (12:57): I find it quite extraordinary that this government is focused on patting itself on the back for investing in 34 infrastructure projects in WA over the last three years and, in particular, that the members for Forrest and Durack should be speaking to this motion. It seems that they are either unwilling or unable to call out their colleagues on the matter of an absolute neglect of Western Australia. The purpose of the National Stronger Regions Fund is to promote economic growth and to address disadvantage—a noble purpose indeed. It is supposedly a mechanism for allowing communities to identify their own priority infrastructure projects. But this government knows that that is not happening at all. The federal government uses the regional infrastructure fund to pump tens of millions of dollars into capital city projects, mainly in coalition-held seats.

In its first round, Senator Glenn Lazarus was right to call it 'another head scratcher from the government'. Why? Because the National Stronger Regions Fund does not actually spend all of its money in regional Australia. The first round of funding, worth \$212 million, committed \$57 million to projects in Melbourne, Adelaide, Brisbane, Perth and Darwin. The third round, announced just last year, committed \$2½ million to connect South Perth to the Western

Australian Liberals' vanity project of Elizabeth Quay. As my colleague the member for Perth mentioned, in WA all but one of those projects have gone to Liberal electorates.

Close to 60 per cent of the projects over the life of this initiative have been in coalition-held seats. This should come as no surprise, given this government's extraordinary track record of what can only be described as pork-barrelling. During the election campaign last year, this government came out with some extraordinary promises, in an unashamed and crude exercise of pork-barrelling. Seventy-six of its 78 projects were in seats held by the coalition before the 2 July poll. In the marginal seat of Swan, the Turnbull government pledged \$20 million for an on-ramp to Manning Road and the Kwinana Freeway. In the seat of Hasluck, another marginal seat, \$300,000 was promised to upgrade Hale Road. In my seat of Cowan, previously held by the Liberals, the government promised \$20 million for an overpass at Ocean Reef Road and Wanneroo Road. But WA has been ripped off by the Turnbull government, with just three of 78 infrastructure projects promised during the election campaign actually being allocated in the state. Despite promising \$860 million, announced during the election campaign, for road and rail projects in WA, the government will instead dedicate just over \$40 million, or 4.6 per cent, to these much needed projects.

I stand here as a proud Western Australian. I have not lived there all my life but I have lived there for most of it. I cannot stand here as a Western Australian without mentioning this government's appalling lack of attention to and incredible neglect of WA and just how complicit in all of this the WA Liberals have been. We have here in this chamber, in this Commonwealth parliament, senior federal ministers on that side of the House. When have any of them spoken for Western Australia? Why are they all so silent? They have failed to deliver a fair GST, and in the same breath the federal Liberal Mathias Cormann has threatened to pull even more money out of Western Australia. The Liberal Party has continued to rip-off Western Australians for far too long. They have taken Western Australia for granted over our GST share for far too long.

The National Stronger Regions Fund pays lip service to the regions, which is why it is so extraordinary that we have a motion here actually praising the government for investing in the regions. In all of this the outer suburbs of Perth in particular continue to suffer. Voters who live in the outer suburbs have had enough. This government offers no vision for addressing their issues. Those who live in the outer suburbs of Cowan can spend hours in their cars each day just to get to and from work and other basic services. It is not good enough, I am afraid, to congratulate the government on relatively minor spending on much needed infrastructure in WA, especially in the outer suburbs and especially when Western Australia is already coping with years of neglect by both Commonwealth and state Liberal governments.

Mr JOSH WILSON (Fremantle) (13:02): I thank the member for Forrest for moving the motion, and I thank my Western Australian Labor colleagues for responding to the topic and coming here to speak today. It is a shame that we have not seen a full book on the other side.

Support for regional Western Australia is important. We are the largest state in Australia, we face the greatest challenges in relation to a dispersed population across enormous distances, and we have a capital city where outer metropolitan areas have a regional function. It is those outer metropolitan regions that are under the greatest pressure from the prevailing economic circumstances in Western Australia. Western Australia is in recession. We have gone from top to bottom: we have gone from lowest debt and lowest unemployment to the

highest per capita state debt and the highest unemployment in a very short term. So we need that support.

The National Stronger Regions Fund, if it did its job, would have played a part in addressing those issues. I am not sure that it really has. In round 1, certainly, Western Australia received only five per cent of all the funding. That seems to be a bit of a pattern in the way in which the coalition approaches Western Australia. As the member for Cowan said, in the course of the election campaign last year, 78 road and rail projects were promised by the coalition as it approached the election but only three of them were for Western Australia. That was \$40 million out of \$860 million in that pool, or 4.6 per cent—less than five per cent. That is half of our population share. As the member for Burt pointed out, we are talking about a state whose regional and rural areas account for a third of the nation, so when it comes to regional funding we should be getting more than our population share. Earlier this year, in the Regional Jobs and Investment Package—another package that is supposedly designed to support economic diversity and play a role in creating jobs in areas that face high unemployment—there was \$220 million for 10 projects. For WA? Zero. There was nothing for Western Australia, even though some of the eligible areas in Western Australia have unemployment two and three times higher than equivalent areas that were funded.

I am glad that under round 3 of the NSRF there were some important projects for Western Australia as a whole. I think the agriculture, innovation and research facility in Dalwallinu is a good initiative. It is one of the areas of economic and jobs growth in the future. I think it is one of the niche, high value-added agricultural areas in Western Australia. I support the upgrade to Centenary Park in Kellerberrin, with a facility that is aimed at young people and tourism. It will provide a skate park in Kellerberrin, which I am sure will be as much loved there as the fantastic esplanade youth park is in my seat of Fremantle. I support those projects. But, as the member for Perth pointed out, it is a bit hard in metro Perth, and it is certainly a bit hard if you are not in a coalition seat to be too positive about the National Stronger Regions Fund when only one or two of the 34 projects in Western Australia under the three rounds so far have gone outside coalition electorates. I think that would cause many people to question just how rigorously that selection process is being undertaken.

Now we transition to the government's Building Better Regions Fund, which the *Weekly Times* described in the following terms:

The Coalition's pet fund for regional development projects will be rebranded and criteria changed to exclude outer metropolitan suburbs.

So the area of greatest need in Western Australia, outer metro suburbs which have a particular regional function in WA, are going to get nothing as the NSRF becomes the Building Better Regions Fund.

So, in Western Australia, we are still waiting to see any meaningful infrastructure spending. In my seat, we desperately need support for shipbuilding and public transport, but we needed that to start two years ago. It would be nice if it started now, but it should have started two years ago. We have had no support for public transport. We have had no support for local roads and bridges. We have had no support for shipbuilding or for coastal shipping, which is an important provider of jobs in my electorate. Really, if you are a Western Australian, the only conclusion you can draw on all the evidence is that the Abbott-Turnbull government and all its members from WA take the people of Western Australia for granted.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Vamvakinou): The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Poverty

Mr HART (Bass) (13:07):

I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

- (a) poverty is an ongoing and serious problem in Australia;
- (b) recent figures by ACOSS found that 13.3 per cent of the population is living below the poverty line of 50 per cent of median household income;
- (c) Tasmania has the highest proportion of Australians living in poverty;
- (d) poverty among Australians is on the rise and is a consequence of structural inequality;
- (e) despite Australia's extensive and well-targeted social safety net, over 2.5 million Australians continue to face serious financial hardship, impacting their quality of life;
- (f) the gap between rich and poor in Australia has been steadily rising—since 1975, earnings have risen three times as fast for the top tenth of wage earners as for the bottom tenth;
- (g) poverty is associated with worse health and education outcomes and a higher risk of exposure to both violence and prison; and
- (h) the government's cuts to welfare payments and inaction on housing affordability and equitable tax reform are likely to increase Australia's poverty and inequality levels; and

(2) calls on the Government to explain to the House how it intends to reduce inequality and poverty in Australia.

In moving this motion, I express my increasing concern with the ongoing problem of poverty in Australia. Inequality in this country is at a 75-year high. Despite Australia's extensive and well-targeted social safety net, over 2.5 million Australians continue to face serious financial hardship, impacting their quality of life. The Australian Council of Social Service released a report late last year that found that 13.3 per cent of our population is living below the poverty line of 50 per cent of median household income. In real terms, that is almost three million Australians living on less than \$426 per week. More and more, the gap between rich and poor is growing: 20 per cent of Australians cannot afford a week's holiday away from home each year; 13 per cent cannot afford dental treatment if they need it; yet, at the same time, Australia's private jet fleet has tripled and the number of helicopters has doubled in the last decade.

Tasmania has the highest proportion of individuals living in poverty. In my electorate of Bass, this translates to a poverty rate as high as 20.81 per cent in some of the more regional areas. Some 10,000 Bass residents are either in receipt of Newstart or the Disability Support Pension, with a large percentage of these households dependent upon income support payments as their main source of income. Unemployment is around 7.4 per cent, with many people in Bass underemployed and some are working up to three casual jobs just to get by in what can only be described as 'insecure work'.

The decision last week by the Fair Work Commission to cut penalty rates for hospitality, retail and fast food workers will only add to this problem. This cut to wages is one that low-

income workers cannot afford and do not deserve. It would likely produce a decrease in economic activity in regional Australia as the disposable income of workers is reduced even further. The McKell Institute estimates that disposable income for spending in regional areas will reduce by anywhere between \$174.6 million and \$748.3 million.

We know that people on a low income, whether employed or in receipt of income support, are less likely to find stable housing, more likely to be unwell and unable to find medical treatment and experience difficulty maintaining the social networks necessary for physical and emotional wellbeing. Indeed, the richest fifth of the population can expect to live, on average, six years longer than those in the poorest fifth.

Poverty is also associated with a high risk of exposure to both violence and prison. Further, poverty is associated with poor educational outcomes. By the time children reach year 9, the attainment gap between those children with parents in high-status occupations and those whose parents are jobless is equal to 4½ years of study in reading and three years in numeracy. The attainment gap for students with higher education parents versus lower education parents is also three to four years. Children from a disadvantaged background are less likely to finish high school and may encounter greater barriers to further education.

Labor knows that education is key to creating higher living standards and reducing inequality. Lateral Economics estimates that the cost of inequality to national wellbeing is the equivalent of \$54 billion, making it a bigger problem than mental illness, obesity or long-term unemployment. I would like the government to explain to this House how it intendeds to reduce inequality and poverty in Australia. It seems to me that they have only one answer to this problem: a handout to big business. Malcolm Turnbull wants to give a \$50 billion tax cut to the biggest companies in Australia. At the same time, he cuts Medicare, schools and hospitals—not to mention that in July this year Turnbull will cut the top tax rate, paid by those earning \$180,000 or more. Ninety-four per cent of the benefits of this tax will go to the top one per cent of Australian adults and, as a consequence of what occurred last week, we will have our lowest paid workers taking home less in their pay packet come 1 July.

The government's cut to welfare payments and inaction on housing affordability and equitable tax reform are likely to increase Australian poverty and inequality levels. This government has no plan for the future of Australia—certainly not dealing with poverty and inequality.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Vamvakinou): Is the motion seconded?

Mr Swan: I second the motion.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (13:12): I appreciate the member for Bass's concerns about poverty in this nation—something every single one of us in this parliament is concerned about. Firstly, we in this nation should be very proud of the strong social safety net that we have. Our welfare bill is currently around \$160 billion a year—quite a substantial sum. In fact, one-third of all government revenue goes into that welfare section. Unfortunately, when it comes to poverty, although the Labor Party like to talk about it, the policy prescriptions that they push will actually cause greater poverty. We saw that from the member for Bass's speech.

He spoke about penalty rates. I am glad this penalty rate decision was made, because it exposes some of the misleading statements that have been perpetuated by members of the

Labor Party. Firstly, the penalty rate decision does not apply to emergency services workers. It does not apply to public servants. It does not apply to our nurses. They are the groups that for the last couple of years the Labor Party have been scaring, telling them that their penalty rates were under threat when they never, ever were.

When it comes to the hospitality industry, it does not affect any workers from Woolworths or workers from Coles, as the Labor Party found out when they rustled up some poor young chap and had him in there, making a fool of himself, embarrassing the Leader of the Opposition and claiming that his penalty rates were going to be cut when that was utterly false because he was an employee of Coles and the employees of the big supermarket and other retail chains are not touched.

When it comes to penalty rates, we should also remember it was a decision made by the Fair Work Commission. And who set up the Fair Work Commission? The Labor Party. And who selected the commissioner? The Labor Party. And what was the commissioner's background? That of a trade union official. He looked at all the evidence and it was his decision that there would be more jobs created, more opportunities and more chance for people to lift themselves out of poverty—by having a job—if that change was made.

Secondly, when it comes to penalty rates, it is simply incorrect for the Labor Party to run around saying that people's wages are going to be cut. There is no compulsion on small businesses to cut the penalty rate—

An honourable member interjecting—

Mr CRAIG KELLY: Yet yesterday—for the member's education, over there—several companies stated that they will not reduce the wages they pay to their staff. And why would they? If they are running a profitable business on the weekend, if they have good staff, there is no requirement to reduce those salaries, and that is what they have said. The real concern about poverty in this country has to be the cost of electricity. Let us look at a couple of examples.

In New South Wales the electricity price—

An honourable member interjecting—

Mr CRAIG KELLY: We are happy to talk about electricity prices every single day until the next election. Every single day we will be talking about them, and the public will wake up and realise that your absurd 50 per cent renewable energy target will push up the price of electricity and increase poverty in this nation. Let us have a look at where we are already.

New South Wales average electricity prices for 2015-16 were 20.93c. Unfortunately, in South Australia—where they think it is really clever to have a 50 per cent renewable energy target—electricity prices are 50 per cent higher for residences, around 30c. What effect does that have? You only have to look at the comparison between electricity disconnections in New South Wales and South Australia.

Look at hardship programs. For every head of population there is double the number of people in South Australia on hardship programs because they cannot afford their electricity. When it comes to electricity disconnections—I cannot think of anything worse than somebody having their electricity disconnected—in South Australia, because of their high electricity prices, it is 60 per cent higher per head of population.

So I call on the members of the Labor Party, if they are concerned about poverty, to drop their 50 per cent renewable energy target. *(Time expired)*

Mr SWAN (Lilley) (13:17): I do thank the member for Bass for this very important motion because inequality is on the rise internationally and—sadly—also in Australia. It is true that Australia has done a far better job than many other developed economies, over the last 20 or 30 years, of avoiding entrenched inequality and higher levels of poverty, but nobody can contest that the rise in inequality in Australia and the attack on low-income earners—driven by this government—is going to result in higher wealth and income inequality. There are a whole raft of policies tearing away at the social fabric, policies that attack conciliation and arbitration, the minimum wage, decent wages for people who work on Sundays, penalty rates and family payments. This government is mounting a full-scale assault on the social safety net and low- and middle-income earners. That will drive up poverty and take us down the American road, which has seen a hollowed-out middle-class and an even bigger army of working poor.

This government is driven, in its policies and tenor, by some of the wealthiest people in this country and they represent some of the wealthiest electorates in this country. The current Prime Minister has the highest average income of any electorate in the House of Representatives: No. 1 of the 150. The Deputy Prime Minister has No. 2 of the 150. The former Prime Minister has No. 3 of the 150. The former Treasurer had No. 4. And the list goes on.

This country's policy settings are being driven by a group of people who live in very wealthy communities, and they simply suffer from the blindness of affluence. They do not walk in the same shopping aisles as average Australians. If they did, they would not be prosecuting a case that is going to force young jobseekers to wait five weeks for Newstart. What is that going to do to inequality and poverty in our community? They would not cut support for young people aged between 22 and 24 who will be pushed from Newstart to youth allowance, losing around \$48 a week. What impact will that have on poverty? What impact will that have on the life chances of those young people?

So we are seeing a full-scale assault on the social safety net and particularly on the industrial relations system that has underpinned, in this country, a commitment to growth with equity, the central mission of the Labor Party. It is why we were formed way back in the 1890s: if we create prosperity, its purpose is to spread opportunity. It is laughable to listen to those opposite try to defend their absurd position on penalty rates by arguing that we created the Fair Work Act. Bloody oath we did—to defend working people, improve their conditions, make sure they get a fair share of the productivity which grows our country, and make sure that wages rise in line with productivity growth. We did all of those things, and we continue to do them, because they stand there to protect working people from the likes of the people that run this government.

Some of the wealthiest people in this country are implementing policies which are ripping away at the heart of opportunity in our community. At the core of what we on this side of the House argue is social mobility: wherever you come from, whatever your gender, whatever your race and whatever your economic circumstances, you should be able to rise up in this country and achieve for yourself and your family. The underpinnings of that are a decent minimum wage and the ability to bargain collectively, which are under assault in an obscene

way by the wealthy people opposite. Health and education, the fundamentals of peace of mind for families but also fundamental to the economic progress of a country, are under assault from those on the other side.

So, wherever we look, we have a government driven by the 'survival of the fittest' mentality. You see it now. Their signature policy is a \$50 billion tax cut for some of the wealthiest companies in the world—simply voodoo economics. The claim that that will drive growth and drive higher income for workers is simply absurd. It is laughable, and it is not backed up by the modelling that comes from the Treasury department, which has exposed what it is: simply an attempt to further concentrate wealth in our community. But it does not drive growth, because this government will not make the investments in critical economic infrastructure and in education and training, the investments which will really drive the income of the country and the incomes of hardworking Australians who get up in the morning, go to work, come home, do it again and expect a fair go in our system. They are not getting it from the Liberals.

Ms SWANSON (Paterson) (13:23): I rise to speak on the issue of poverty, which is a serious and ongoing problem in Australia. As we have heard, poverty is on the rise, the gap between the rich and the poor is increasing, and the government's ongoing cuts to welfare payments are only making matters worse. Far from having a plan to reduce inequality and poverty in Australia, this government is intent on pushing more people below the poverty line.

This government's Social Services Legislation Amendment (Omnibus Savings and Child Care Reform) Bill 2017, being debated in the House on this very day, continues to slash and burn the welfare safety net that has been so important to so many for so many years. Here is the list of cuts that this government would ram through: cuts to family tax benefits, which would leave a typical family on \$60,000 a year around \$750 a year worse off; cuts to paid parental leave, which will make 70,000 new mums worse off; scrapping the energy supplement, a billion-dollar cut to pensioners, people with disability, carers and Newstart recipients; and a five-week Newstart wait, forcing young people to live off nothing for five weeks. I doubt that any of us here in this place could do that, let alone people who are some of the most vulnerable in the community. They will have to wait five weeks before they can access any kind of income support

There are cuts to payments to young people between the ages of 22 and 24 by pushing them onto the lower youth allowance—a cut of around \$48 a week, or almost 2½ thousand dollars a year. That is an enormous amount of money when you are between the ages of 22 and 24, and trying to get on with your life. They are scrapping the Pensioner Education Supplement and the Education Entry Payment, and cutting the pension to migrant pensioners who spend more than six weeks overseas, often keeping their family connections close—it is so wrong. And if all that were not bad enough, the Turnbull government is holding the National Disability Insurance Scheme hostage over its \$5.6 billion in cuts to families, new mums, pensioners, people with disability, carers and young job seekers—truly, trading off one group against another.

I have spoken in this place previously about the Turnbull government's attack on pensioners. Its changes to the assets test that came in this year have the pensioners in my seat of Paterson truly reeling. Its refusal to review the deeming rates, which are just ridiculous; its

mean and miserly plan to keep older Australians working to the age of 70; and giving \$50 billion of tax cuts to big business just do not add up.

There are attacks on Medicare, attacks on school funding and attacks on so-called Centrelink debtors. It goes on and on. This government does not care that poverty is getting worse in Australia or that inequality is getting worse in Australia, because if it did it would stop the slash and burn of our welfare safety net. It would recognise that poverty is associated with worse health and worse education outcomes, and with a higher risk of exposure to violence and to prison. These are not the foundations of a terrific society, the society that we have in Australia that we want to try to boost. It would recognise that poverty affects Indigenous Australians more than any others, and that we are in fact now nowhere near closing the gap in life expectancy or in any measure of health and wellbeing between our first peoples and non-Indigenous Australians.

And then we have the gleeful response by those on the coalition to the Fair Work Commission's cut to penalty rates last week. The workers affected by this callous decision are some of the lowest-paid in our community. In fact, nearly 700,000 Australians will be \$77 a week worse off under this decision. Seventy-seven dollars is a lot of money when you are working on a Sunday to try to make ends meet.

And who is speaking up for them? Not the Turnbull government. They have been incredibly quiet. It is only Labor that is going to speak up every day, going into bat for these workers. And we will shout it from the rooftops, from this day to election day, reminding people who their friends are when it comes to trying to make ends meet. That is Labor—it is certainly not the Turnbull Liberal government.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Vamvakinou): The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting. The Federation Chamber is suspended until 4 pm.

Sitting suspended from 13:28 to 16:00

STATEMENTS BY MEMBERS

Citizenship

Mr HILL (Bruce) (16:00): Australian citizenship is precious, and I have raised concerns before in this place about maladministration by the government. These concerns are growing. On Saturday I hosted a large community meeting with the member for Isaacs. We had around 350 people, which is a lot, given that we just stuck a notice out on Facebook two weeks ago. I would like to thank Hayatullah Rahimi and the Omid Cultural Association for organising the meeting with us, and Asher Hirsch from the Refugee Council of Australia.

We heard hundreds of reports of devastated people whose lives are now in limbo. They cannot travel, they cannot see family and they cannot go overseas to complete their studies. Their mental health is suffering because this government has failed to process their citizenship applications. These delays are inexplicable. The Federal Court of Australia in December found unreasonable delays in the case of two men—18 months and two years they had been waiting—and the court could not now rule out the possibility that a certain class of people were being picked on in mysterious ways.

This is the tip of the iceberg. The minister gave evidence to the court—he was forced to give evidence—admitting that there are over 10,000 cases which are considered complex now delayed. And yet how many people does the department have trained to work on these cases? Twelve—12 people working on 10,000 cases! They will never get processed without pressure.

Labor will speak up. We call on the government to clear the backlog this year, and to apologise to these people whose lives are in limbo. *(Time expired)*

Banks Electorate: Carlton South Public School

Mr COLEMAN (Banks) (16:02): Recently I visited Carlton South Public School in my electorate, to meet with the P&C. Of course, Carlton south came into the Banks electorate after the recent redistribution. It was good to get along and have a chat with the members of the P&C just this month.

One of the big plans of the P&C at the moment is for an outdoor covered play area. It is very much needed, and it was good to discuss that issue. This is a particularly active P&C. It has raised many tens of thousands of dollars in recent years for the school community, working on projects such as the installation of new interactive smart boards and increasing the amount of air conditioning in the school.

I would like to thank the principal of Carlton South Public School, Darren Galea, and the members of the P&C who I met on the day—Andrew Karamitos; Heidi Breeze, the vice president; Deanna Heffron, the treasurer; and Lisa Laaman, the fundraising coordinator—for their contributions at Carlton South Public School.

Carlton South Public School has over 600 students. It is one of the largest of the 50-plus schools in the Banks electorate. I very much enjoyed the morning tea and chat with the P&C, and I look forward to working with them further in the future.

Western Australian State Election

Mr KEOGH (Burt) (16:04): Figures released by the ABS today show that wages and salaries dropped by 0.5 per cent in December while company profits rose by more than 20 per cent. And what was the Turnbull Liberal government's response? Why, to give a \$50 billion handout to big business while at the same time cutting wages, of course.

The Fair Work Commission's unfair decision on penalty rates will see more than 700,000 workers have their pay cut and all at the behest of the Liberal Party. Sixty Liberal and National members called for it. This will be a hit on the Australian economy. As the Governor of the Reserve Bank acknowledged last week, people with less income in their pockets will spend less in our economy. But the decision has a significant impact for Western Australia also, because the Turnbull government's refusal to stand up for Australian workers has given the Barnett Liberal government the green light to attack Western Australian workers. Just one day after the Fair Work Commission handed down its decision, Premier Barnett came out and told us that Western Australians working under the state award system should suffer the same fate. He made the promise that all Liberals do when they are too scared to be honest: a review of state awards. He then went on to say that he would like to see Sunday penalty rates reduced. This is the Liberal agenda writ large—throw working people under the bus while helping out their mates in big business. Western Australians can send a message to Barnett

and the Prime Minister in less than two weeks: vote Labor on 11 March, because only Labor will defend your wages.

Calare Electorate: Rural Fire Service

Mr GEE (Calare) (16:05): On 18 February 2017, the Cudgegong Cruisers together with the Mudgee Lions Club held a community gathering for all Rural Fire Service personnel and anyone associated with the recent firefighting efforts in the region. I was honoured to be part of that event.

RFS volunteers from Mudgee, the surrounding areas and around the state have been kept very busy over the last few weeks, lending support and assistance to neighbouring communities and brigades, including fires at Sir Ivan, Kains Flat, Castlereagh Highway at Tallawang, Maitland Bar South and Maitland Bar Road, Merotherie Road and Campbells Creek Road at Windeyer. The Cudgegong Cruisers and Mudgee Lions arranged the gathering to say thank you to our hardworking RFS volunteers.

The Cudgegong Cruisers is a family-oriented association of keen car and bike enthusiasts based in the Mudgee district. They played an important role in organising this event, and I would like to make mention of Glenn Box, Gary and Linda Goodman, John and Cheryl Stuart, John and Sue Hodges, Jim and Luene Cottee, Suzie and Peter Schmidt and Tony Riley. I must also make mention of the mighty Mudgee Lions Club, including Leah McMurtrie, Darren McMurtrie, Bailey McMurtrie, Heather and Geoff Priester, Jenny Roberts, Carolyn Sheen and Tom Cook.

On the day, \$1,360 was raised, which will be donated to the RFS in New South Wales. Thank you to the Cudgegong Cruisers and Mudgee Lions Club but, most importantly, thank you to all of our RFS volunteers, who came from all over New South Wales to help our region deal with this extremely serious fire emergency.

Young Endeavour

Mr WATTS (Gellibrand) (16:06): Last week, I had the privilege of setting sail with the youth crew of the *Young Endeavour* after they had docked at Seaworks in my electorate of Williamstown during its circumnavigation of Australia.

Since it was gifted to the youth of Australia in 1988, the *Young Endeavour* has sailed on 558 voyages and has been crewed by 13,509 16- to 23-year-old Australians at sea for around 11 days a stretch. A partnership with the Royal Australian Navy, the Young Endeavour Youth Scheme is focused on increasing self awareness, developing teamwork and leadership skills and creating a strong sense of community responsibility amongst the members of the youth crew.

I was certainly impressed at the extraordinary capability that young Australians had shown and developed over just a 10-day period at sea. I spent some time on the day hauling ropes on the deck so that we could set sail, and I can say that it was not easy work and nor was it simple work.

I want to thank Martin Radunz for his help in organising a fantastic day, and also a big thank you to Lieutenant Commander Gavin Dawe, or 'Captain Gav'; Stephen Moss, the Executive Director of the *Young Endeavour*, and all the brilliant *Young Endeavour* crew who showed me the ropes, like Deborah from Melbourne and Lisa from Tasmania.

Despite the difficult physical and mental challenges of the trip—seasickness is an obligatory part of the trip, I am told—neither Deborah, Lisa nor any of the *Young Endeavour* crew wanted their voyages to end. This is a sentiment that I can completely understand after having spent such an enjoyable day in their company. I hope that the *Young Endeavour* continues to sail around Australia for many thousands of voyages to come.

Melanoma

Mr DRUM (Murray) (16:08): My 90-second statement is in relation to melanoma. Australia has one of the highest rates of melanoma in the world. It is the third-most common cancer in men and women, and one person dies from melanoma every six hours.

Emma Jones is an amazing young 47-year-old from Yarrawonga in my electorate. She has had three melanomas removed in the past six years. She is under very close medical watch, because she may develop stage 4.

As a child, Emma was told by her doctors to lay out in the sun to treat her psoriasis, but now, many years down the track, that advice has been catastrophic. But she is not letting this hold her back. She is going to travel to China to raise money for the Melanoma Institute. She is going to join Courtney Stevens, Fiona Stevens and Kerry Babour on the trek of a lifetime along the Great Wall of China, setting off on 14 September and sleeping in local villages to raise money and awareness for Melanoma Awareness Week. This year, it is going to be held on 20 to 26 March in her home town of Yarrawonga. She is encouraging all businesses in the Goulburn Valley to get involved and get on board.

Emma says she intends to turn one of the most difficult periods of her life into a positive. She wants to get fit and healthy again. Her surgeon is extremely excited by this trek. She hopes that she will be saving lives by raising the money through this endeavour. Coincidentally, I had my own check-up two weeks ago, where I had four or five burns frozen off. I will have a little biopsy taken off the lip next week, so that might shut me up for a while. At least you can feel good about the fact that you have been checked out, and I encourage all men and women to get their skin checked out by a local surgeon.

Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria

Ms VAMVAKINO (Calwell) (16:10): I want to congratulate the Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria on not only another successful Lonsdale Street Greek Festival, which took place this weekend, but also on celebrating 30 years of continuous festival activities in Lonsdale Street. I also want to acknowledge that the local member for Melbourne, Adam Bandt, was in attendance and has always been in attendance.

It is an exciting milestone because this festival began as a success story and continues to be one 30 years later. In fact, my very first real job was as coordinator of Greek Week, the forerunner of today's Lonsdale Street Greek Festival. It began as a week of events in and around Melbourne celebrating Hellenism and Greek culture. It grew into the Antipodes Festival and came under the auspices of the Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria.

The Lonsdale Street Festival is a combination of the hard work of Melbourne's Greek community and is supported by the Victorian government. I want to commend the dedication and tireless work of the festival team, led by Jorge Menidis and Penny Kyprianou, the festival's co-chairs, Tammy Ilious and Leonidas Vlahakis, and the many and varied

enthusiastic volunteers who I want to acknowledge, as they are behind-the-scenes masters who enable this weekend-long event to run smoothly and become bigger and bigger each year. This year, I understand, there were some 100,000 people who rocked Lonsdale Street this weekend.

Greek Orthodox Community of Melbourne and Victoria

Ms BANKS (Chisholm) (16:11): I too would like to talk about the Greek Lonsdale Street Festival held in Melbourne on Saturday evening. It was an absolute pleasure to be together with my friend and colleague the Hon. Kelly O'Dwyer, members for Higgins and Minister for Finance and Revenue, who was representing our Prime Minister, Malcolm Turnbull, a self-proclaimed philhellene, at the 30th Lonsdale Street Greek Festival.

The Lonsdale Street Festival, also commonly known as the Antipodes Festival, is the largest celebration of Hellenic culture outside Greece. It has been organised by the Greek community of Melbourne since 1987. The vibe and excitement of the event was palpable, with tens of thousands of people embarking on the Greek precinct of Melbourne's CBD to partake in the festival at its milestone 30 year event. We heard the wonderful students of Alphington Grammar sing with pride the national anthems of both Australia and Greece. The longevity of such an amazing event is a testament to the strength, camaraderie and absolute friendship amongst Melbourne's Greek community.

The City of Melbourne is intrinsically linked to the Greek culture and this was on magnificent display last weekend. The event is a celebration of Australia's Greek community, of our immigration heritage and story and enduring love for Greek Australians. Many thanks go to Bill Paperstergiadis, president of the Greek community of Melbourne, and George Menidis, director of the Greek Centre and Lonsdale Street Festival. As we said then: Zito Ellaga Zito Australia Aito Melbourni.

Dobell Electorate: Merry Makers

Ms McBRIDE (Dobell) (16:13): Every Thursday night at the Entrance Public School up to 80 adults with an intellectual disability and their carers meet for the Merry Makers Dance. Merry Makers is a volunteer community charity founded by the late Gordon House in 1987. It has been providing social activities for people with disability across the Central Coast for almost 30 years.

In addition to the weekly dance, Merry Makers meets for dinner dances, barbecues, picnics and monthly social outings. The service relies on volunteers as committee members, hosts and bus drivers, and I would like to acknowledge the 20 volunteers who give their time so generously.

I had a great time with the Merry Makers last week, and I thank Lloyd for inviting me to take part and for all he does to told these great occasions. Thank you to Barry, one of the many volunteer bus drivers, to Louise and disability workers who help make this event happen each week and to Robert's 81-year-old mother, Joyce, who cares for her 64-year-old son, without respite, and loves the night out. Special thanks go to Tory and James. It was a lot of fun dancing the hokey pokey, the chicken dance and Nutbush with you. Enjoy the next dinner dance!

Finally, to DADHC, the Entrance Public School and Toukley Senior Citizens, thank you for your ongoing support of this outstanding local charity. It was wonderful to be with you on

Thursday night, to see everybody enjoying themselves and the great atmosphere. Congratulations and thank you.

Wimmera Machinery Field Days

Mr BROAD (Mallee) (16:14): Next week on 7, 8 and 9 March is the Wimmera Machinery Field Days. I invite all my colleagues to come and visit the electorate of Mallee and see the field days. The people I represent in the Wimmera-Mallee are some of the most hardworking, fair-minded and decent Australians you will find. I would argue that they are some of the best looking, but that might be indulgent!

Madam Deputy Speaker, can I just say that if you come to the field days what you will see is first-rate farming techniques that are in practice now across Australia—no-till farming systems. We have just been able to grow more grain across the Wimmera and Mallee than we have ever grown before and during seasonal conditions that we have normally encountered. You will see a community that is very vibrant, very profitable and very enthusiastic about the future of agriculture and also about the future of their towns. It is something to behold.

At the Longerenong site, we have the Longerenong Agricultural College, which is full of young graduates, who are coming out and contributing to agriculture—men and women. I think it is a fifty-fifty gender split. We have the Bayer CropScience research centre. It is a wonderful facility; it is a wonderful place. Come out for a day out. You will learn more about Australian agriculture, you will learn more about country people and you will get an appreciation for just why I am so passionate about the people I represent.

Oxley Electorate Spirit of Anzac Award

Mr DICK (Oxley) (16:16): Today I am excited to update the House of the inaugural Oxley Electorate Spirit of Anzac Award. This is a competition open to students in year 11 across the Oxley electorate. They have been invited to submit a short essay, poem or piece of art work on what the spirit of Anzac means to them. The recipient judged to be awarded first prize will receive flights and accommodation, with a parent, to visit the Australian War Memorial and Parliament House later this year. Anzac Day holds a special place in the hearts of many Australians, as we pay our respects to those who gave the ultimate sacrifice for our country. I am looking forward to receiving entries from students across the electorate as to what this special commemoration means to them.

A selection committee consisting of representatives from my local RSL subbranch has been convened to judge the most worthy recipient. Last Wednesday, I had the pleasure of joining year 11 students at Forest Lake State High School to officially launch the competition, alongside Mr Bob Richards, the newly elected president of the Forest Lake RSL Sub-Branch; Mr Steve Ford, the secretary and chairman of the Commemorative Committee; and Mr Brian Roche, the treasurer. I would particularly like to thank Mrs Denise Kostowski, the new principle at Forest Lake State High School, for joining me at the launch. We have some of the most dedicated and hardworking RSL subbranches in Oxley, who do a tremendous job of representing veterans. I am proud to work side by side with them, and I am looking forward to partnering with the branches as part of the Oxley Electorate Spirit of Anzac Award.

McMillan Electorate: Roads

Mr BROADBENT (McMillan) (16:17): The Sand Road-Longwarry interchange, on the main highway to Gippsland, was always a very dangerous intersection in my electorate. It has

just been finished, ahead of schedule. It fixed a notorious black spot. The speed limit will return to 110 through that intersection, offering quicker trips for traffic.

A major upgrade of this part of the freeway is an intersection with a service centre on each side. Once the service centres went in, it became even more difficult to traverse. This intersection plays a major role in the traversing from northsouth to eastwest. The bridges that we have put in have enhanced opportunities for farmers, particularly heavy milk trucks, in the northern part of that area of West Gippsland, to traverse into the southern part where all the factories are and where the milk is processed. So it is a very important piece of infrastructure.

I want to congratulate former Mayor Debbie Brown, the state member for Narracan and all the councillors who have lobbied for many years to get this intersection upgraded. I told them on the day that I nearly lost my own life at that intersection because of how dangerous it was. It has been fixed. It is safety first. I believe we are saving lives. There have been more than 25 crashes in that area over the last few years. This is a very good piece of infrastructure. Thank you to Minister Darren Chester for coming down to open it.

Parramatta Electorate: Refugees

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (16:19): Last year, I met with an exceptionally bright group of students and their teacher, Larissa Mitchell, from Northmead Creative and Performing Arts High School. The concern of these students is that, as holders of temporary protection visas, they have no access to government funded university places and no capacity to pay. They are young people who desperately want to contribute to our society and, like students all over the world, they simply want an opportunity to improve their lives and the lives of their families and to see just what they are capable of.

Western Sydney University have stepped up. From this year, they are providing scholarships to refugee students on bridging visa Es and TPVs. In fact, I was thrilled to discover that one of the young women I met last year, 20-year-old Parastoo Bahrami, was accepted to Western Sydney University on one of these scholarships. She and her family fled Afghanistan and were in transit for 10 years as refugees. They arrived in Australia in 2012. Despite the fact that the family still live in visa uncertainty on bridging visas, Parastoo will study nursing in Western Sydney University's brand-new campus, which is across the street from my office in Parramatta CBD. These new scholarships will be provided at great financial cost to the university and will require extensive ongoing fundraising. I would like personally to thank all of the donors that have made these scholarships possible. The scholarships provide tuition fees for a three-year undergraduate degree and a bursary amount of up to \$2,000 for books and materials. Thank you, Western Sydney University, for this trailblazing scholarship. You are doing a wonderful thing.

Domestic and Family Violence

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (16:20): I rise to defend Australia's values and condemn anyone who ever thinks that it is okay to hit a woman. I refer to comments by the prominent Muslim leader Keysar Trad implying that violence against a woman is okay as a last resort for husbands. Trad, who is the president of the Australian Federation of Islamic Councils, basically said on national television, on the Andrew Bolt show on Sky News, that blokes should first try flowers, chocolates and dinner dates before they resort to beating their wives. Let me make one thing very clear in this place: violence against a woman is never okay. It is

entirely unacceptable in all circumstances, and I do not care if you bought flowers, chocolates, a car or a new house: you never raise a hand to a woman.

Trad's comments sparked outrage across my entire electorate. The people of Wright are outraged that this man, who is meant to be a leader of the Muslim community, would be so irresponsible as to condone such behaviour. Sure, Trad made excuses for his comments afterwards, saying that it was just clumsy, but the damage had already been done. In a time when we are having to fight harder than ever to defend Australian values, Trad's comments have only served to increase fear amongst nationalities.

I stand with Minister for Immigration and Border Protection Peter Dutton and Minister for Women Michaelia Cash, who publicly condemned Trad's comments as dangerous and unacceptable. I will finish by echoing Minister Dutton's words that this is Australia and anyone who comes to our country should abide by our laws. I also want our daughters to succeed, to be in a loving relationship, to get a good education and a good job, and to be the equal of any man. (*Time expired*)

Somalia: Drought

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (16:22): I rise to inform the parliament about the urgent humanitarian situation facing Somalia as a result of the prolonged drought. Poor rainfall over the last year has led to failed crops and perishing livestock, so that acute malnutrition is widespread across the country. People living in the most drought affected areas have confronted disease outbreaks, food insecurity and limited access to water. The United Nations has warned:

Unless a massive and urgent scale up of humanitarian assistance takes place in the coming weeks, famine could soon be a reality in some of the worst drought-affected areas in Somalia.

It estimates the number of people in need of food assistance as 6.2 million. Members of Melbourne's Puntland community inform me that, in the regions of Puntland and Somaliland, nearly 385,000 people face acute food insecurity.

Australia has a responsibility to act in response to this crisis. What we are seeing in Somalia now is a sign of what is to come if we do not take urgent action to curb climate change. Scientists are telling us that climate change will mean changes to rainfall patterns, and records indicate there has already been a decrease in rainfall in parts of northern Africa. These are regions where many people depend on agriculture and are highly vulnerable to food insecurity.

In raising this important issue in parliament, I would particularly like to acknowledge the advocacy of Hani Ahmed, who from Melbourne regularly raises funds and support for initiatives to support education and health in Puntland. She has been active in calling on Australia to act in the face of this humanitarian emergency, and I support this call.

Bennelong Electorate: North Epping Sports Centre

Mr ALEXANDER (Bennelong) (16:24): Community spirit and the benefits of active recreation were on splendid display yesterday in North Epping, where I had the absolute pleasure of representing Senator the Hon. Fiona Nash in opening the multisport North Epping Sports Centre. It was a long time coming and a testament to the drive and commitment of those who were behind it. All aspects of the community had a hand in bringing the centre to life. Federal, state and local government all contributed, with state member for Epping

Damien Tudehope and Hornsby Shire Deputy Mayor Councillor Michael Hutchence present. The local Epping branch of the Bendigo Bank was a major sponsor. Their chairman, Graham Boyd, said some very nice words. North Epping Rangers Sports Club provided significant funds, while the North Epping Bowling Club donated their land.

Thanks to the vice president of the Rangers, Karen Michie, for making the event, and to the bowls president, Bill Daly, and vice president, Ken Douglas, for hosting us. The mix of sport from very young netballers to five-a-side soccer to tennis and to lawn bowls provides active recreation for boys and girls of all ages. This is the essence of community and of preventive medicine.

Merriang Special Developmental School

Mr GILES (Scullin) (16:25): The promise of Labor's National Disability Insurance Scheme is, of course, that every Australian counts, and every Australian must count. We must work harder to build a society that is truly inclusive and equal. But, when it comes to education, it is clear today that not every Australian counts. I thought about this when I visited Merriang Special Developmental School in Lalor in my electorate last week. It is an amazing school doing incredible things, and I thank the principal, Helen Halley-Coulson, for all the work that she and her team does.

I particularly want to acknowledge the work of Leonie Gap, a teacher who invited me to spend time with her class, who took me to lunch and talked me through their work. It was inspiring to spend time with these kids working their way through education with support, passion and compassion from amazing teachers. I would like to take this opportunity in this place to recognise Leonie's work, Helen's work and the incredible place that is Merriang Special Developmental School.

But there is so much more to be done to make sure that every Australian student with a disability gets access to a quality education. We need to work so much harder to get the data right, to end the excuses that have so often characterised Minister Birmingham's engagement with this issue. We have to work in this parliament over the life of this parliament to ensure that every school can offer the same experience to students with disabilities that Merriang Special Developmental School does.

Foreign Affairs and Aid Sub-Committee

Mr CREWTHOR (Dunkley) (16:27): As Chair of the Foreign Affairs and Aid Sub-Committee of the Joint Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade, I rise today to speak about aid. This area is of great interest to me. Free trade, aid and open investment are keys to an international perspective that is relevant to today's political climate. With increased mobility, an interconnected world is inevitable, so it is natural that unrest and political interest should reach beyond international borders.

Australia's involvement overseas occurs in many forms, with children's education, creating job opportunities and making people's lives safer amongst many other important missions. Key to this is sustainable aid. We should be promoting and assuring this as a government. This includes, for example, not giving mosquito nets from China to a community where there is a local mosquito net manufacturer and where you put the local person out of business. It includes working to ensure development, particularly in our region, is sustainable.

As the Chair of the Foreign Affairs and Aid Sub-Committee, I was very pleased to recently launch an inquiry into establishing modern-day slavery legislation in Australia. The appalling practice of modern slavery is a scourge that, regrettably, continues to affect millions of people around the world, including in Australia. I look forward to talking about this further and to tackling this issue as part of the subcommittee.

Medicare

Ms KEAY (Braddon) (16:28): Yet again I need to put on the record that Tasmania has felt the brunt of the government's Medicare bulk-billing freeze. There were over 383,000 fewer visits with bulk-scheduled fees across the country in the last six months along. Tasmania is the hardest hit, with bulk-billing for GPs dropping nearly two per cent in that period, from 76.4 per cent to 74.5 per cent, the lowest in the country. As a result of the government's cuts, Tasmanians are paying more and more out of their own pocket for their own health care. This is in a state with an increasing ageing population and with people who are generally lower paid and simply cannot afford to cover the extra cost needed to see a doctor.

GPs across the country are reeling from the open attack on general practice. The Royal Australian College of General Practitioners in a letter to me recently said, 'Nowhere is this being felt more acutely than in the northern suburbs of Hobart and in the north-west of Tasmania,' in my electorate, where for the first time in memory struggling patients are being asked to pay out-of-pocket expenses for GP visits. As recently as October, the AMA warned that this would happen with AMA Vice President Dr Tony Bartone saying:

The freeze is an enormous burden ... on GPs.

and

Practices cannot continue absorbing the increasing costs.

He also said.

Many patients will pay more to see their doctor because of the Medicare freeze.

Unfortunately, it seems his predictions have come true. The reality is that these cuts are hurting—(*Time expired*)

North Queensland Sugar Industry

Mr CHRISTENSEN (Dawson—Chief Nationals Whip) (16:30): The North Queensland sugar industry remains in limbo this afternoon after the foreign-owned miller Wilmar and sugar marketer QSL yet again failed to negotiate a deal at 9 am this morning. Without an on-supply agreement between Wilmar and QSL, farmers cannot exercise their right to choose who markets their sugar, a right guaranteed in the choice in marketing legislation enacted in the Queensland parliament last year.

Since the Singaporean miller announced its intention to extend its monopoly into sugar marketing, it has used every possible means to prevent choice in marketing to circumvent the Queensland law. Wilmar delayed today's 9 am meeting to 12.30 this afternoon and then cancelled that one as well.

The Queensland opposition will now submit legislation to parliament to force the parties into urgent arbitration so farmers can enter supply agreements for a crop they will be harvesting in just over three months. But, given Wilmar's past behaviour and its willingness to

abuse its monopoly position to ride roughshod over farmers, a better solution is going to be needed in the long term.

I note the Deputy Prime Minister has given North Queensland canefarmers a commitment that he and his government will do whatever it takes to get a solution. When this issue was first raised in 2014, the Liberal-National government set up a taskforce chaired by me, and the recommendation coming out of that taskforce was to legislate a mandatory code of conduct for the industry. If Wilmar does not know what conduct is acceptable for business in Australia, I have got to say, we will spell it out for them.

Macquarie Electorate: Freemans Reach Public School 150th Anniversary

Ms TEMPLEMAN (Macquarie) (16:31): I rise to speak about Freemans Reach Public School, which has celebrated its 150th anniversary just this weekend. It was a privilege on Friday night to be at the school. This is a school that is older than most schools around the country, and the only place you can really get a flavour for what the Hawkesbury was like in my electorate of Macquarie at the time when Freemans Reach Public School became a public school is by going to Thompson Square, one of the oldest remaining public squares in the country. We cannot get a feel for what the school looked like 150 years ago, because it is now on its third site. However, what we can do is look at what the area was like. It was a largely rural area, and the schoolroom was completed in 1832. It was not until August 1866 though that a formal application for a school was lodged with the Council of Education—obviously, the forerunner to our current New South Wales Department of Education.

The school consisted of two rooms made of timber slabs with a shingle roof. There was no furniture, no equipment, no books other than scripture books, no toilets and no fences. So from very humble beginnings came a wonderful school.

It is now on its third site, and I think the number of students, past parents, past teachers and past principals that came on Friday night shows what a great school community has grown over that 150 years. I would like to pay tribute to all of those who have been part of creating Freemans Reach Public School.

Cairns Regional Hockey Academy Singapore Development Tour

Mr ENTSCH (Leichhardt) (16:33): Last Wednesday I proudly presented uniforms to the Cairns Regional Hockey Academy Singapore Development Tour squad for 2017. These girls have been preparing and training hard for eight weeks, so it was wonderful to recognise their efforts in front of their friends and families. Today they are flying to Singapore where they will play two games against the under-23 national program and take part in a range of life-changing cultural experiences.

This is the eighth time a team has travelled to Singapore from Cairns, and it is an incredible opportunity when you consider that the younger girls' average age is about 15½. The team includes one of Cairns Hockey's very successful Aspire to Be Deadly Program participants, Carleah Flinders, who will be named as captain, demonstrating how the mentoring and leadership elements of the Aspire program are coming together. Congratulations to Carleah. The two senior players are aged over 18. They are also training as mentor coaches.

On the weekend, the squad of 16 will split into two teams to play the Singapore Sixes. In 'Jade' and 'Sapphire' they will reflect the green and the blue of our iconic rainforest and reef. Thanks to David McNeil, Cairns Hockey regional coaching director and international coach,

who is invaluable in sharing his experiences, his skills and his knowledge with the group. We look forward to seeing the girls return very, very successfully of course, and all the better for that wonderful experience that they will have.

Moreton Electorate: Member of Parliament for a Day Competition

Mr PERRETT (Moreton—Opposition Whip) (16:35): Madam Deputy Speaker, as I am sure you would be well aware, the life of a politician can be tough. There are 226 federal politicians in this building, 800-plus state and territory politicians, and more than 700 local councils with politicians in all forms, some remunerated and some not. In order to further my electorate's understanding of the role of a politician, I am running a competition with my local high schools where I will give the local high school students the chance to spend a day with their federal member of parliament. That is not a consolation prize, Madam Deputy Speaker! I hope I can put on a day that is more exciting than a day of having to listen to the Centrelink issues and the concerns of people who have had inaccurate notices about their debts sent to them. Instead, I will try to organise a fun day for the winner of the competition.

The competition will be available to all the high school students in my electorate. All they will have to do is put together a video of 30 seconds or so indicating why they would like to be an MP for a day. I look forward to sending out information about this competition to the high schools in my electorate in the next few weeks. I am sure that they will have a fun day—I will make sure that they have a fun day. And I am sure that they will support it—not because I am saying that the life of a politician is tough but so that they have a better understanding of how important are democratic traditions are.

QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute

Mr EVANS (Brisbane) (16:36): Last week I was fortunate to tour the QIMR Berghofer Medical Research Institute and have the opportunity to hear from some of the scientists at what is Queensland's largest medical research centre. Currently, there are 17 ongoing clinical trials based on QIMR's work, led by their researchers, across four programs: cancer, infectious diseases, mental health and chronic disorders. The importance of these trials to progressing our understanding of these conditions and to curing them cannot be understated.

I met with the director, Professor Frank Gannon, to talk about the opportunities for medical research in Australia and the challenges it faces. We had quite a good discussion about medical funding, and I was very interested to hear the quite remarkable extent to which QIMR leverages its government funding into further funding and support. Professor Gannon explained how their research work is split evenly between exploration—that is, finding treatments and cures—and translation, which is putting the research into tangible, scalable and commercial benefits for the Australian and international communities.

I have to say, I found the research to be absolutely fascinating. I was shown epilepsy treatment involving electronic waves being sent through coils in the brain, with researchers led by Professor Michael Breakspear; cystic fibrosis research with Professor Grant Ramm; and so much more. This is about fostering a critical mass of medical science and research capability. It is about our local talent pool, it is about great facilities, and of course it is about outcomes.

National Multicultural Festival

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (16:38): Nearly one in four Canberrans volunteers each year, and it makes a whopping \$1.4 billion contribution to the ACT economy on an annual basis. One of the best showcases of our spirit of volunteering is one of Canberra's biggest community ticket items, the Multicultural Festival—or the 'MultiCulti', as we like to call it here.

This year hundreds of thousands of people turned out to sample every form of food on a stick and every form of dumpling known to humanity. There was non-stop entertainment on multiple stages and there were also hundreds of stalls where community groups could showcase the support they are providing to a range of individuals and organisations across the community in our nation's capital.

This year, as with every year, thousands of volunteers made all this possible. They barbecued, they fried, they poured, they stirred. They fetched and carried and served. They staffed information stalls and educated Canberrans about the services provided by their organisations and groups. They danced and played music. They paraded in an amazing array of costumes lovingly created over countless late nights. They reminded us why we are so proud to be Canberrans and so proud of the diversity of our great city.

I congratulate and thank all the community organisations and volunteers who made the MultiCulti another success this year.

Lang, Mr John, OAM

Mr FALINSKI (Mackellar) (16:39): You may not know John Lang, but every member of this House and every member of the other place knows a John Lang. John Lang is a stalwart of my Northern Beaches community. John's service to our community and nation is immense. To name but a few examples, John served as a pilot in the Second World War, is active in the Rotary Club of Brookvale today, was a district governor of Rotary, is vice-president of the Dee Why RSL sub-branch, served as the chair of SCEGGS Redlands and is a member of the Liberal Party—and has been for over 40 years, having served as president of state and federal conferences.

John was awarded his Order of Australia medal in 1999 for services to the community through charitable and service organisations. John is active and innovative and when asked to serve cannot say no. Despite his years, John shows no sign of slowing down. Not everyone knows John Harold Albert Lang OAM, but we all know a John Lang—a person who puts the service of others first, a person who is about their community and makes a difference to the world of those around them. Australia needs more John Langs, not fewer. I was sad to hear that recently John injured himself in a fall after a Brookvale Rotary meeting and is recovering. John, I wish you a hasty recovery and look forward to seeing you soon.

Workplace Relations

Mr GILES (Scullin) (16:41): Today, in this parliament Labor members have made a choice. We have chosen to take seriously the challenge the Fair Work Commission has handed down to all of us and to stand up for the 600,000 low-paid Australians who have been delivered a pay cut. We have made a choice to act because we can act; this parliament can do something about this pay cut which affects Australia's lowest-paid workers, including thousands of people in my electorate of Scullin. In doing so, we are aware of the context:

today, wage growth is at a record low and inequality is of course at a record high. Under these circumstances, it is simply unconscionable that Australia's parliament would not act to provide redress to people who need our support. As we do so, we remember on this side of the House that it was this government that referred these questions—and really everything that matters to any Australian who works for a living—to the Productivity Commission, it is this government that created the licence to put downward pressure on wages and it was the then minister for employment who talked about a wages explosion as a problem Australia had to solve. We of course face the reverse problem: too many Australians do not have enough to get by and we have a government that is blind to this. We can do something about this by supporting the Leader of the Opposition's private members' bill and by supporting secure take-home pay.

Boothby Electorate: Australia Day Awards

Ms FLINT (Boothby) (16:42): Today I would like to congratulate Australia Day award recipients in Boothby from the City of Marion and the City of Mitcham. From Mitcham, I honour the Citizens of the Year, Rhys Roberts and Rosemary Fisher. Rhys has been an active Lions Club member for 32 years and, among many roles, has managed the Lions Club Bargain Centre for the past nine years, growing its sales to \$3,000 a week. I know Rhys well, and Lions is just one of his many volunteer roles in our community. Rosemary Fisher has been a dedicated volunteer at Meals on Wheels for 18 years, so much so that she coordinates the volunteer drivers for the six delivery routes in Mitcham Council. The Mitcham Young Citizen of the Year, Danika Pederzolli, volunteers at the Mitcham Colonel Light Gardens Cadet Division of St John Ambulance. Danika became superintendent in 2016 at just 20 years old.

From Marion, I congratulate the Citizen of the Year, Robyn Richards, who founded the Friends of the Elderly in 2011. Among other roles, Robyn also teaches English to migrants at the Mitchell Park Neighbourhood Centre. The Marion Young Citizen of the Year was Amy Rust, who leads the charity Essentials 4 Women SA. Amy organises a team of more than 25 devoted volunteers who distribute care packages to homeless women every week.

It speaks to the calibre of my local residents in Boothby that we have so many unsung heroes in our community. I congratulate them and I thank them for being an inspiration to me and to our Boothby community.

Great Barrier Reef

Mr BANDT (Melbourne) (16:44): I would like to read to the parliament a letter sent to the Prime Minister by my constituents:

Dear Mr Turnbull,

Our names are Clara Nutt and Rachel Nutt.

We are eight years old, and we live in Melbourne. We think the idea to put more ports near the Great Barrier Reef should not be allowed.

The Great Barrier Reef is already suffering from coral bleaching due to global warming and digging deeper channels for the big ships will make the waters even worse.

A healthy reef needs clean water. Even if the reef grows back, it will take hundreds of years. We personally think that the government should be doing more to help the reef.

Thank you.

This letter was accompanied by a petition signed by 64 members of the Ascot Vale Uniting Church congregation calling on Australia's leaders to stop the Adani coalmine that is putting the reef in danger. I would like to thank them, and particularly thank Clara and Rachel for standing up for the reef.

Let us be very clear: this government must make a choice between coal or the Great Barrier Reef. Because of climate change, last year saw the largest die-off of corals ever recorded along the reef, and reports this week are suggesting that the reef is on track for a second consecutive year of massive bleaching. If heat events continue to get more frequent, the reef will not recover. We must make a rapid transition from coal to renewable energy. If we do not, by the time that children like Clara and Rachel are the age of Canberra's politicians, the Great Barrier Reef will no longer exist.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bird): In accordance with standing order 43, the time for members' statements has concluded.

PRIVATE MEMBERS' BUSINESS

International Development Assistance

Mr GEORGANAS (Hindmarsh) (16:45): I move:

That this House:

(1) acknowledges Australia's important role in building a fairer and more equal world through its contribution to international aid;

(2) notes that:

(a) while the global community is making progress towards ending poverty, hunger and the worst epidemics, global inequality remains a problem with many millions still living in extreme poverty;

(b) challenges such as the threat of global unrest and conflict, human slavery, refugees, terrorism and radicalisation, mass migration, humanitarian crises and climate change, all require global solutions and cooperation;

(c) Australian aid makes a significant contribution to addressing the root causes of conflict, helps prevent the factors that drive people to seek asylum and helps create stronger democracies, stable states and strengthen communities and economies; and

(d) nations that were once aid recipients such as China and South Korea now have fewer people living in extreme poverty and are now major economies and trading partners for Australia; and

(3) acknowledges the continuing need for Australian aid to increase to advance our common goal to eliminate poverty around the world in line with the United Nations Millennium Development Goals signed by former Prime Minister John Howard in 2000, and reconfirmed by the Minister for Foreign Affairs through the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals in 2015.

I am a firm believer that societies are judged on the way they treat their most vulnerable members, and this can be applied just as much to our national community as to the global community we are all part of. Foreign aid plays a vital role in creating long-term global political and economic stability. Australia's aid program is an important tool in tackling the root causes of global challenges such as disease, poverty, climate change and environmental degradation. It builds collaboration and empowers other nations to lead their own development and address local issues including extreme poverty and inequality. No-one can deny the benefits that aid has generated globally, from the elimination of, for example, smallpox— an achievement that has saved well over 200 million lives—to improved health

services for women and children, halving the mortality rates for children under five years of age and for pregnant women since 1990. These are big achievements.

Since the end of the Cold War, aid has helped promote the democratisation of nations and helped strengthen fledgling democracies around the world. But it is not only recipient countries that benefit from foreign aid. Australian aid contributes to stability amongst Australia's close neighbours, including the Solomon Islands, Timor-Leste and the Autonomous Region of Bougainville in PNG. These countries have experienced periods of conflict, instability and at times illnesses and diseases et cetera, the elimination of which we take for granted. Our aid helps keep stability in these countries, some of the nations closest to us, and therefore stability in our region. A lack of stability could be both costly and dangerous. Australian aid also helps control the spread of disease, as I said earlier, such as stemming the spread of TB, which is a problem in PNG, one of our closest neighbours. In the Solomon Islands Australia has worked with the World Health Organization to assist the Solomon Islands government in its attempts to reduce malaria, bringing about significant declines in malaria incidences in the country.

Of course, there are many arguments that people use to diminish the effectiveness of aid, and corruption is just one example that we hear often. It is easy to dismiss the effectiveness of aid, because problems persist in so many countries around the world. Sometimes it can feel like a drop in the ocean. But that should not stop us from continuing to explore new ways of helping those in need. The data shows that aid does work. It is working where we are assisting. For example, the proportion of the world's population living under the World Bank's lowest global poverty line fell from 42 per cent in 1981 to just 11 per cent in 2013.

Here in Australia we are known for our sense of fairness and equality, and we can be proud of the significant achievements of the aid programs we have delivered throughout the world and our region. Our aid effort is slightly above average and we remain a significant donor, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region. However, given the problems faced around the world and the benefits foreign aid can have on Australia, directly and indirectly, we must remain vigilant. We must not allow it to decline, as it has been now for some time. Our aid contribution is now at its lowest level in Australia's history, at 0.23 per cent of gross national income. When most Australians hear these figures, they often report saying that we should be increasing our foreign aid. This shows that we are a compassionate nation. When you sit down and actually explain those figures to people, the majority response that I normally get is that we should increase it.

We are a compassionate nation, and I understand that there are also many people in need right here—in our backyard. We have the real responsibility to help these people, but I suppose that it does not have to be a question of either/or. Most Australians recognise that help needs to go where it is needed and that in doing so we all benefit.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Ms Bird): Is the motion seconded?

Mr Watts: I second the motion and reserve my right to speak.

Mr CREWTHOR (Dunkley) (16:51): I rose before, in a 90-second statement, to speak on aid and modern slavery, and I will expand upon those statements now. As chair of the Foreign Affairs and Aid Subcommittee of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Trade Committee, this area of aid is of great interest to me. Many different areas of policy currently face increased

scrutiny, and international aid is one of the most critiqued areas of the law. The globalisation movements of decades gone past are now being questioned and foreign policies are being evaluated with the same degree of scrutiny, if not more, than domestic policies.

It is not often, however, that the full scope of our international involvement is considered. Australia, for example supports the work of organisations such as the Red Cross, Save the Children and the UN Population Fund in the critical humanitarian work they do around the world, and supports the UNHCR as well. Our aid program works with the intent of countering local instability in the country where it occurs, and aims to prevent the displacement of even more people around the world. We strive to prevent regional instability and conflict by addressing humanitarian concerns at their origin. We cannot exist in isolation in a world that grows progressively more interconnected. That said, aid that we currently give and that we might give in the future must be sustainable aid. That is, it should ensure growth of the local communities. One example that I used before is that of mosquito nets. If you ship mosquito nets into a community in a country in Africa instead of using the local mosquito net manufacturer, you can put that person out of business.

We must also promote the benefits, including promotion of regional security as well as diplomatic relations and the influence those provide, not only in our region but around the world. If we do so, we have the potential to enhance and perhaps even to expand our aid program.

I experienced this in Kosovo, where I formerly worked through the UN as an international lawyer at the Kosovo Property Agency, resolving property claims for people who lost possession of their properties due to the conflict—whether they were farms, homes or businesses. The Kosovo Property Agency was an independent agency, but it relied on donors—essentially, aid—from around the world to exist. Its existence was important because it ensured that private property rights could be given back to the people who owned those homes. They could return to those places, they could sell those places or they could rent those places. It also ensured that the country could ensure that the right person who owned the property was on the books, and that then promotes international investment.

Let's look at Dunkley. Dunkley is an important community in terms of our contribution to international aid as well. For example, the Australian Council for International Development notes that we have 149 corporate sponsors in Dunkley, as well as 64 church and community groups, 401 locum returned overseas volunteers, 10,802 individual supporters and 38 schools, including Kananook Primary School, Mount Eliza Secondary College, St Macartan's Parish Primary School and more.

Australia's aid program, as the Australian Council for International Development sets out, is an important tool in tackling the root causes of global challenges. We live in an international environment where non-state based actors and issues at the global level are threatening stability and prosperity. Australia's aid program builds collaborations and coalitions which empower other nations to lead their own development and make progress against pressing common challenges such as extreme property and inequality.

I mentioned before my work as part of the Foreign Affairs and Aid Subcommittee, looking into modern-day slavery legislation in Australia. I would like to expand upon this further. Part of our aid program does go towards combating important issues such as sexual slavery and labour slavery, particularly in our region. Our committee is inquiring into whether Australia

should adopt national legislation to combat modern slavery comparable to the United Kingdom's Modern Slavery Act 2015 and hopefully even improving on that legislation.

According to the 2016 Global Slavery Index, an estimated 45.8 million people around the world are in some form of modern slavery, including over 4,000 in Australia. This describes a range of exploitative practices, including human trafficking, forced labour, wage exploitation, forced marriage and debt bondage. The Attorney-General's important action in approving this important topic initiated by the subcommittee provides us with the opportunity to explore whether Australia's laws can be improved to prevent modern slavery, both in Australia and in the supply chains of businesses and organisations that operate in Australia and overseas. I was very pleased to launch, on 17 February, this inquiry, and I look forward to working to enhance both our work in the aid program and our work around modern slavery legislation in Australia.

Mr WATTS (Gellibrand) (16:56): I thank the member for Hindmarsh for moving this important motion. We should start all debates of this kind by saying clearly that Australian aid matters. It is not a luxury product. It is not a feel-good optional extra for our country. Australian aid is literally a life-or-death issue for the children who are born in medically supervised environments, immunised from life-threatening diseases and given sanitised water as a result of Australian funded projects. Australian aid is literally life changing for the children who are able to go to school and the women and girls who are able to take control of their sexual health and their family planning and the women who are able to gain financial agency through village microcredit programs as a result of Australian funded projects.

Australian aid matters to the millions of people in our region and around the world whose lives have been saved or whose futures have been transformed. But Australian aid also matters to Australians and to the Australian national identity. At the strategic level, it matters to the stability of our region. We rightly invest billions of dollars in the Australian Defence Force—\$32 billion a year—to ensure that Australia's interests can be protected from international threats. We should surely invest a tiny fraction of this in Australian aid to prevent the emergence of these threats in the first place. It is in all of our interests that a nation like Papua New Guinea, a rapidly growing nation of eight million people and our nearest northern neighbour, develops a strong government and a stable economy. People in Far North Queensland understand the implications of living within swimming distance of a nation on the verge of an epidemic of drug-resistant tuberculosis. It is in all of our interests that the Australian aid program assists the PNG authorities to head off this epidemic, just as we assisted them to head off an imminent epidemic of HIV-AIDS over the past decade.

It is in our national interest for Australian aid to support the work of the United Nations High Commission for Refugees to provide the support services for asylum seekers and resettlement channels for refugees necessary to prevent the irregular mass movement of people through our region. And it is in our national interest, as a smaller nation, to support the rules based international order. Foreign aid, development aid, is in many ways the price of entry for being a good global citizen in the multilateral forums that Australia relies on to advance its national interests on the international stage.

A world in which every country looks out only for itself would not be a favourable world for Australia, and this is the real nub of the debate about Australian aid. It is a debate about the kind of world we want to live in and the kind of country that we want to be. Do any

among us really want to live in a nation that tells our children that they must only look after themselves? Well may people say that charity begins at home, but nobody said that it should end at home—not for the country of the fair go, not for a nation founded on egalitarian values and not when it is within our control to save and transform the lives of millions of children who are no different in human dignity to our own.

Unfortunately, funding for Australian aid has not matched our values in recent years. While the previous Labor government substantially increased Australian aid spending during its six years of government, billions of dollars have been cut from Australian aid—\$11 billion—under the Abbott-Turnbull government. This has brought Australian aid levels not only below the OECD average but also to the lowest levels since records began in the 1970s. The 2016-17 Turnbull government budget spent just 23c in every \$100 of our national income on foreign aid, and on the current trajectory our aid program will continue to fall over the next decade, to just 0.17 per cent of gross national income. It is not good enough. These are life-or-death cuts that will have life-and-death consequences for real people around the world. We need to do better, for their sake and for our own. I have seen Australian aid at work in countries like Afghanistan, Papua New Guinea and Cambodia, and I can attest that Australian aid is a projection beyond our borders of the values that we have within our home. It is a projection of the kind of nation that we want to be and the kind of world that we want to shape.

At the moment, there is an emerging crisis on the African continent that calls on us to be particularly engaged, and this is the emerging famine situation in South Sudan, Nigeria and Somalia, where 3.9 million people urgently need food assistance. So I call on the Australian government, and I call on all Australians in a private capacity, to contribute generously to avert this imminent crisis. We risk having a generation of young people in these countries wiped out by this famine, a famine the scale of which we have not seen for some decades. Consider the impact this will have on the development of these countries. Consider where it will leave these countries in future years. As I say, I call on the current government—including the foreign minister, Julie Bishop—and on Australians in their private capacity to give generously to avert this emerging crisis.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (17:01): I would just like to pick up a few points raised by the member for Gellibrand—firstly, the claim that the coalition has somehow drastically cut Australia's foreign aid. Let's just go through a few of the facts. In the 15 months prior to the 2013 election, the former Labor government actually cut \$7.5 billion from the aid budget. You also diverted \$750 million from the aid budget to pay for your border protection blow-out, so the third largest recipient of Australia's aid was actually the Gillard government. So for members of the Labor Party to come in here and lecture us, saying we should spend more on aid, is really a step too far.

Even Bob Carr, the former foreign minister, has made it very clear that you cannot run an aid budget on borrowings, and that is what the previous Labor government did. They borrowed all this money to generously give it away. And do you know what? They borrowed most of the money from overseas, so the Labor government's idea of a foreign aid project was to borrow money from overseas to then give it away overseas. And we wonder why we had to come in and make some sensible decisions. As Bob Carr said, we cannot run a foreign aid

budget on borrowed money. We have to get our budget back into balance before we can do anything towards increasing our foreign aid.

When it comes to talking about our foreign aid expenditure, one thing I think we need to look at is to reclassify some of our defence expenditure. We have our new landing helicopter docks, HMAS *Canberra* and HMAS *Adelaide*. Although all that expenditure is classified as defence, effectively these vessels will work in foreign aid and emergency situations, exactly as we recently saw in Fiji. The costs to pay for those vessels are coming out of the pockets of the Australian taxpayer, and those vessels are an enormous boost to providing foreign aid when there is a natural disaster.

There is another thing that we need to make sure is very clear about aid. The member for Hindmarsh's motion notes:

... nations that were once aid recipients such as China and South Korea now have fewer people living in extreme poverty and are now major economies and trading partners for Australia ...

That may be true, but they did not become successful because we were giving them foreign aid. They became successful and lifted hundreds of millions of people out of poverty because they went down the track of free markets and a free-enterprise system.

An honourable member interjecting—

Mr CRAIG KELLY: It was, member for Kingsford Smith, maybe one of your mates, Bono, who over the years has been a good leftist who recently said:

Aid is just a stop-gap.

You may like to write that down—

Commerce, entrepreneurial capitalism takes more people out of poverty than aid.

And that is very true. That is what makes the biggest difference to people in poverty in the world. Down the track, if they open up their economies and take advantage of entrepreneurial capitalism that will lift more people out of poverty than any particular handout.

When it comes to what we can do for people in the Third World suffering from poverty, one of the great problems these people face, at the moment, is the issue of indoor air pollution. In fact, we are often told about indoor air pollution. This is where people living in the Third World simply do not have reliable and cost-effective electricity, so they are forced to burn dung, wood and twigs to cook and heat their homes. That causes millions of deaths every year.

In fact, the World Health Organization has said that there are 500,031 children—that is, over half a million children—under the age of five, the majority being girls, that die from indoor air pollution because they do not have access to low-cost electricity. Yet some of the policies that we have that are preventing people in the Third World from getting access to low-cost electricity are directly responsible for those hundreds of thousands of deaths.

Mr THISTLETHWAITE (Kingsford Smith) (17:06): I am pleased to support this motion. I congratulate and thank the member for Hindmarsh for moving it. Earlier this year, Oxfam revealed in a report that eight men, including Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg and Microsoft CEO Bill Gates, own the same amount of wealth as the poorest half of the world's population. The report entitled *An economy for the 99 percent* found that the income of the poorest 10 per cent of people raised less than \$3 a year between 1988 and 2011. Global

inequality continues to be an intractable problem and one that is testing the mettle with world leaders tasked with turning around the dire circumstances of many.

To do our bit, when Labor was in government, Australia's overseas foreign aid budget increased from 28c in every \$100 to 37c in every \$100 by 2013-14. Today, unfortunately, thanks to the cuts, in particular, of the Abbott government but continued by the Turnbull government, Australia spends just 23c per \$100 on overseas aid. Our overseas aid budget, at the moment, is the lowest it has ever been in our nation's history after the foreign minister allowed not one, not two but three cuts to the foreign aid budget—three cuts to her portfolio—valued in total at \$11 billion.

This government removed—can you believe this?—as one of the goals of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade and our overseas aid budget, 'alleviating poverty'. They removed that as a goal for our aid budget and replaced it with something to do with international business. We have seen cuts to eye health programs in Vietnam and cuts to sexually transmitted disease health programs in Africa. There is little doubt that this quite 'madness of endless aid cuts', as described by World Vision CEO Tim Costello, has damaged our reputation as a responsible global citizen while cutting public health, education, infrastructure and biosecurity projects.

Australia has a particular responsibility to assist its neighbours, particularly in the Pacific region, to bring them out of poverty, to provide infrastructure to grow their economies and, importantly, to help them tackle the devastating effects of climate change. I have often said that the small populations of the Pacific Islands contribute next to zero to climate change but they feel the effects greater than any other nation in the world. Australia as the largest economy and largest emitter per head of population in our region has a responsibility to assist those nations make a transition and reduce the effects of global warming and climate change on their economies.

In government, Labor established the Australian community based climate change action grants to provide practical on-the-ground support for climate change resilience, and the former government invested \$34 million in this program. We know that the Abbott-Turnbull government has done its best to destroy the renewable energy industry in Australia, through its attacks on the renewable energy target. Labor accepts, overwhelmingly, the science of climate change and that human activity is causing increased temperatures and making it much worse for Pacific nations.

There was \$11.3 billion cut from the aid budget for development assistance. We all know that we are dealing with tight fiscal circumstances but it is important to remember that in addition to alleviating poverty and global inequality Australian aid is aimed at ensuring the development of economies and achieving a world that is more secure. These goals remain as important as ever.

In my previous role as parliamentary secretary for the Pacific Islands I saw the difference that Australian foreign aid can make on the ground. I visited the bridges and roads that were funded by the previous AusAID, that have connected communities and provided communities—for the first time—the ability to interconnect, to trade with each other and to grow their incomes. I visited hospitals like the tuberculosis clinic that I opened in Daru, in the west of Papua New Guinea, and saw the difference it has made to the lives of people who suffer tuberculosis, a growing affliction in the Pacific, particularly in Papua New Guinea.

Australian aid makes a difference and this government should feel shame for cutting the aid budget by \$11 billion.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hastie): The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Disability Services

Mrs SUDMALIS (Gilmore) (17:12): I move:

That this House:

- (1) recognises the important work being done in Australia to support people with disability;
- (2) celebrates the winners of the Tenth National Disability Awards 2016; and
- (3) notes that International Day of People with Disability was on Saturday 3 December 2016.

The coalition government recognises the important work being done in Australia to support people with disability. Who would have thought that we would have over four million people in Australia with a disability? Why do Australians try to take such good care of those with a disability? Firstly, we have a responsibility to the United Nations, because we are a party to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. I am not sure, however, that the people I meet who are heroes for those with a disability are compelled for that reason. I believe they look after them because they have the most beautiful and compassionate hearts. Almost 2.7 million Australians care for someone with a disability, a medical condition, mental illness or someone who is frail due to age.

Some of our local heroes in the role of disability carers and advocates include Lynn and Frank Condello at the Yattah nursery, looking after their granddaughter. They also include Annette Pham who is the mother of Liam, a teenager who is profoundly disabled. She is an amazing advocate for the changing-places toilet. Most of us never even consider how hard it would be to travel with a young adult who needs to be lifted from a wheelchair to be changed or toileted. Shawn and Gina Burns and their son Mack were told Mack would never be able to communicate, but due to their dedication he is able to give answers by foot tapping. They have been working for years to increase awareness of the need for inclusivity. John and Rebecca Nevin, who hold fundraising nights called Drawtism, are raising awareness for children with autism.

These are just a few of the examples of the brilliant work done by friends, family and advocates in Gilmore. We have many support groups, families and organisations for potential employment, giving structure, care and work experience for those with a disability. Yumaro, in Moruya, is a standout operation for Gilmore. Their CEO, Mark Brantingham, and his superb team are at the centre of operations, where they rightfully showcase their business enterprise, their client training and their great family-inclusive atmosphere. Next time you buy cleaning cloths from Bunnings you can rest assured you are supporting this amazing disability enterprise. We have Slice of Life, we have Flagstaff and we have Greenacres, all ensuring that adults with a disability have a full and meaningful life.

In 2016 we celebrated the winners of the 10th National Disability Awards and I was proud to see the dementia project delivered by Kiama Municipal Council named winner of the Excellence in Community Partnerships Award. Kiama has become a role model in catering for residents with dementia. The award is well deserved; it is a partnership between

Alzheimer's Australia and the University of Wollongong. Simple things like changing signs and making them easier to read and understand makes the world of difference for people with dementia. The result? It is easier for people to stay in their homes and in the communities they know and love. Another local hero, Brendan Auslebrook, captains the Jervis Bay Wild cruise that provides access for those with a disability to go dolphin watching. Jackie Kay is the Sailability champion and Culburra Men's Shed builds the boats for her group. We truly have a terrific community helping those less fortunate.

On a formal note; there is a 10-year national policy framework for all levels of government to improve the lives of people with disability; the National Disability Strategy 2010-2020 is Australia's overarching framework for improving the life outcomes of Australians. One of the key already commenced directions of this strategy include efforts to increase employment opportunities for people with disability and to assist them to remain in employment; development of the NDIS; implementation of recommendations arising from reviews into disability standards for accessible public transport, education and access to premises.

We all recognise the National Disability Insurance Scheme is a critical policy, and delivery of services has bipartisan parliamentary support. The NDIS is one of the largest social and economic reforms in Australia's history, and it is the result of the enormous dedication of many people all over Australia. It supports people with a permanent and significant disability that affects their ability to take part in everyday activities. The transition phase is an exciting period for the NDIS. We have a large number of people joining the scheme during a short period of time, which naturally enough will also give rise to some significant challenges, not only for those with a disability but also for their carers and provider organisations. The most important aspect of this is to work constructively together to ensure the outcome is the best it can be for those with a disability, as it is their quality of living that is most important.

This year, we celebrate the 25th year of the Disability Discrimination Act, originally put together in 1992, which makes it unlawful to discriminate against people with disability in a whole range of areas. An important date for our calendars this year is Sunday, 3 December—the International Day of People with Disability. We should all work out how to showcase these wonderful people, their wonderful carers and all the terrific provider organisations that we have.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hastie): Is the motion seconded?

Ms SWANSON (Paterson) (17:17): I second the motion. Mr Speaker, I rise to speak on the private member's motion that celebrates the achievements of people with disability in our community. I make particular mention of Paralympian Liesl Tesch, who I had the pleasure of spending some time with on Australia Day this year in beautiful Port Stephens in my electorate of Paterson. Liesl was last week preselected as the Labor candidate for the New South Wales state seat of Gosford. I note that I am joined this afternoon in the Federation Chamber by the member for Dobell. There will be a by-election held soon in Gosford and I know that, if elected, Liesl will do an outstanding job of representing the people of Gosford.

This year, Liesl was the Australia Day Ambassador for Port Stephens and shared with those celebrating our national day what it means to be Australian and what makes Australia great. The message was as simple as it was profound: 'We embrace change,' Liesl said, 'We make things possible.' Liesl has certainly embraced change and made things possible, not just

for herself but for thousands of people. She has influenced so many along the way, as she did on Australia Day in my electorate. She was truly magnificent.

In her outstanding career of 24 years as a Paralympian, Liesl has won five medals, including two silver and a bronze for women's basketball and back-to-back gold medals in sailing. Liesl, who was honoured as a Member of the Order of Australia in 2014, has also done so much for other athletes with disabilities. She co-founded Sport Matters, which supports and encourages athletes with disability in developing countries, and is working to establish the national Paralympian Mentoring Program, in which up and coming Australian athletes with a disability will be mentored for three months by Paralympians past and present.

Also, as a high school geography teacher, Leisel has inspired cohorts of young people to embrace change and make things possible. She lists as some of her priorities, if elected to office, education and youth employment. Her closing remarks on Australia Day this year were an encouragement and an inspiration to us all: set yourself some goals and make Australia a great place.

In the area of disability, we Australians have set ourselves some goals, and those goals are encapsulated in the National Disability Insurance Scheme. The NDIS is a new way of providing support for people living with a disability. Created by the Rudd-Gillard Labor government, it is a whole-of-life approach—a major reform of disability services in Australia, designed to provide the right support according to each person's needs and goals. True choice and control is something that we all want in our lives. It is a noble aspiration, and I know it is working for many people.

I was also heartened the other day to catch up with Graeme Innes, another outstanding Australian with a disability, whose contribution I would like to celebrate. Graeme is a former Disability Discrimination Commissioner and now a board member of Life Without Barriers. He was catching the same little plane as me. We call it the 'bug smasher'. I know that the member for Dobell has been on that plane with me before. It is tiny. It flies from Canberra to Newcastle, and it is a fabulous service. I had interviewed Graeme in my past life in radio and was always inspired by him and his ability to embrace change and make things possible—a bit like Leisel, really. Graeme has been a strong advocate of the NDIS as a way of changing lives, not just the lives of Australians with disabilities but the lives of those with whom they interact and love. On the eve of its rollout, Graeme said that all Australians would feel the change that the NDIS would bring. Hundreds of thousands more jobs would be created across the country in support of roles for the scheme, and many people with disabilities would move off welfare and into work.

While I was boarding that little bug smasher of a plane with Graeme, climbing up the very narrow stairs and squeezing down the very narrow aisle, side by side with Graeme and his very well-behaved dog, I was reminded of the determination and the drive that it takes for people with a disability to do what many Australians without a disability take for granted. He is truly inspirational. The NDIS can give that determination solid support. But, as Graeme said when it was launched, it is not without bumps, and they are the bumps that we must continue to smooth out to make it great.

Mrs ANDREWS (McPherson—Assistant Minister for Vocational Education and Skills) (17:22): I thank the member for Gilmore for this motion, acknowledging those with a disability and those who care for a person or people with a disability. When it comes to the

vulnerable and the disadvantaged, Australia is a caring nation and that fact is reflected in the work of this parliament in its efforts to improve the lives of those with a disability. I have tremendous respect and admiration for those who either volunteer or choose a career to care for and support people with a disability. There are many examples of this around the country, including in my own electorate of McPherson on the Gold Coast. I have been privileged in my capacity as the federal member to support organisations, such as Disabled Surfers Association.

In a part of the country where the beach is such a significant part of everyday life, the association members are making sure that those with a disability get to enjoy a day in the water, just like everyone else. I would like to thank the Disabled Surfers Association and its volunteers. It means a lot to those with a disability to get to surf, as well as those in their families who are there supporting them. I would particularly like to acknowledge two of the disabled-arm surfers whom I have got to know over the last couple of years, and that is TJ and Ernie. TJ and Ernie, I thank you for allowing me to grow as a person. I certainly have done that since I had the enormous privilege of getting to know you.

With over four million Australians living with a disability and 2.7 million people caring for those who need assistance, we know that there is a lot that needs to be done. One of the coalition's election commitments was the establishment of the National Disability and Carers Advisory Council. The council plays an important role in assisting the government to deliver key reforms to improve the lives of people with a disability and assist carers. Council members have been selected from organisations with skills and experience in the disability sector, both government and non-government. Its first meeting group created three working groups in key areas of employment reform, carer reform and the National Disability Strategy reinvigoration.

A priority of any policy reform is to improve the lives of people with a disability, and that is to ensure that they are given every chance to gain employment. We all know how important having a job is to self-esteem, not to mention the ability to support yourself and, in some cases, your family. Sadly, statistics show that workforce participation among people with a disability is just 53.4 per cent, with an unemployment rate of 10 per cent, which is well above the national rate. The Turnbull government knows Australia can do better, and this is a focus of the reform agenda, particularly with our changing economy and innovations leading to new jobs being created that have not existed before. As Assistant Minister for Vocational Education and Skills, I know that many of these opportunities will come from training and qualifications achieved through this sector of education. I am hopeful that vocational education and training can play an important role in delivering on this commitment.

As I mentioned, there are thousands of Australians who are doing extraordinary work every year to improve the lives of those living with a disability and, in doing so, have contributed to recognition of equality and human rights for all Australians. I, too, pay tribute to those who received special recognition for their efforts at the 10th National Disability Awards, with the winners announced at Parliament House late last year. All are very worthy recipients and, for some, the recognition has been the result of many years of dedication in this area.

Australia is making important steps in ensuring that people with a disability are included as valued and contributing members of our community. This is something we should recognise and look to improve every day, but I look forward to Sunday, 3 December this year, when we

celebrate International Day of People with a Disability. It will be the 25th time this day has been acknowledged. I join with all members to fulfil the government's aim to increase public awareness, understanding and acceptance of people with a disability, and celebrate their achievements in our community.

I would like to finish with a quote from Robert M Hensel, who has spina bifida but has never been held back by that disability. He said:

There is no greater disability in society than the inability to see a person as more.

Ms KEAY (Braddon) (17:27): I would like to congratulate the honourable member for bringing this motion before this chamber and the parliament, as it is important that this parliament recognise the fantastic work done by so many in Australia to support people with a disability. With parents, caregivers, support networks, disability organisations and research institutions, there are so many in our nation who make a contribution towards improving the lives of people who live with a disability. I would also like to congratulate all the finalists and winners of the 2016 awards. There is an amazing cross-section of people who are all working hard and making a difference.

I do note that my electorate, and Tasmania as a whole, did not have a nominee in the 2016 awards. But that is not to say that the Tasmanian community does not make a contribution. In fact, in 2015, we had a finalist from my electorate: the Wynyard Yacht Club, in the Excellence for Community Accessibility category. Led by Chris Symonds, who is unable to walk more than 10 metres unaided due to a rare degenerative condition called Kennedy's disease, the Wynyard Yacht Club has created a Sailability program, an initiative providing open-access sailing experiences to the elderly, children and people with a disability. Chris has invited me to go sailing with him soon, and we shall be sailing on the Inglis River and, might I say, a very small section Bass Strait in the Sailability craft. I will be sure to take some Kwells that day! As mentioned, this club was a finalist in the 2015 National Disability Awards and has won Australian Sailing's Club of the Year and the Australian Sports Commission's Community Club Award. The Sailability program brings people to the club from all over Tasmania and has recently installed a lift to enable greater access to the clubhouse for elderly members and those with a disability. Wynyard Yacht Club has also been nominated to host the sailing events at this year's Masters Games, which will be held in the northwest of Tasmania. The club already possess sailing yachts that allow people with mobility issues to compete, and their recent addition of the lift adds to the club's inclusive environment. The Wynyard Yacht Club, like every other winner and finalist of the National Disability Awards, is an example of what we can do as a nation that prides itself on supporting the development of an inclusive society.

'A nation that prides itself on supporting the development of an inclusive society,' are actually the words of the honourable Assistant Minister for Social Services and Disability Services when she announced the finalists for last year's awards. I am confident that if the honourable member or assistant minister were to have a conversation with any of the previous National Disability Awards finalists and winners then they too would be appalled by this government's move to link funding of the NDIS to cutting payments to pensioners and other vulnerable people in our community. It is not a very inclusive society that plays one vulnerable group off against another to fund the NDIS while at the same time wanting to give

big business a \$50 billion tax break. I would hope that the disability assistant minister and those on the other side are arguing the case to have this plan reversed.

Families that live with a disability need the NDIS and certainly do not need it treated as a political football. Already it is making an enormous difference to people's lives in my electorate. One such person is Mandy from Smithton, who explained to me the two reasons why the NDIS is important to her and her family, the first being that the old system did not allow respite. Mandy's daughter Sarah suffers from Rett syndrome and epilepsy. The NDIS means that once a month Mandy and her husband can have some respite. Before the NDIS, many low-income families simply could not afford respite even when it was available. Importantly, though, Mandy and her husband know that their daughter would be cared for if something happened to them or if they both became ill. Their minds are at ease. They know that their daughter's NDIS plan is there, with provisions for when they are not around. Sarah would go into a group home but, most importantly, that group home can be in the local area of Smithton. It would be devastating to remove Sarah from her local area, as the locals know her and the area is her home. Mandy is now concerned that without proper funding this may not happen. What will become of Sarah into the future?

It is great we celebrate the people and organisations that are a part of the disability sector. Their passion and commitment to overcome so many challenges should be recognised and they deserve this House's congratulations. But if we are truly to become an inclusive society, the stupid political games have to end and the NDIS has to be delivered in the way it is meant to be.

Mr WALLACE (Fisher) (17:32): I am grateful to the member for Gilmore for raising this issue again, and for the opportunity to speak about a subject that is very important in my own family. On the substance of the motion, though there is more to be done, the government should certainly be congratulated on its delivery in this policy area. Most importantly of course, the government has committed to repairing Labor's \$6 billion black hole in the funding of the NDIS, ensuring that one of the largest social and economic reforms in our history is able to make the life-changing difference that people with disability deserve. The government has also rightly recognised the vital role of unpaid carers in improving the lives of many Australians. This government is investing \$166 million in support for carers, including respite care to give them time to participate in education and employment.

The government should be especially commended for the creation of the Carer Gateway online and telephone system. The 24-hour needs of many people who are living with disability can make it very difficult for their carers to get out and access government services. An online portal and phone service is a long overdue and highly effective tool to overcome this challenge. I look forward to the outcome of the co-design process, which forms the next phase of developing future services for carers. This co-design process, along with the government's National Disability and Carers Advisory Council, are examples of the collaborative and consultative approach that we are taking to the development of policy in this field. I am grateful that the voices of people with a disability are being heard.

As a society, we have made a substantial effort in recent years to set aside days, weeks and months to raise awareness about many of the challenges that people face and to celebrate their accomplishments. Many of these causes are deserving, and the intentions behind the creation of these programs are, for the most part, admirable. The National Disability Awards and the

International Day of People with Disability are fantastic initiatives, and this House should undoubtedly celebrate them both. However, as the parent of a child who lives with disability, I also want to remind the House that these excellent schemes, seeking as they do to highlight and celebrate, must not distract us from an important reality. In my experience, people living with disability, of all ages, typically do not want a fuss. They prefer to be treated just like everybody else. The people with disability that I have encountered are striving, like all of us, to build the most successful and rich lives for themselves and their families that they can. If they want to be celebrated, it is for the same things that we all want to be celebrated for—our successes and achievements.

Just over one week ago I had the opportunity to attend the Queensland state swimming championships with my wife and my daughter Sarah. I saw an inspiring and truly impressive performance from a young lad named James Fitzgerald. I am grateful to James and his family for letting me tell the chamber a little bit about his swimming. James is 11 years old, but, like most good athletes, he started swimming when he was quite young. For the last five years or so, James has been working on his technique with enthusiastic determination. Like all of us, he began with flotation aids, but for the past two years he has been swimming entirely unaided. He joined a local Queensland club, the Somerset Hills Seals, and decided to take his swimming to the next level.

With the support of his club and his family, James has been working towards being classified, so that he can swim competitively—and 'competitively' is exactly the right word for it. James has cerebral palsy, a condition which mainly affects his legs and means that he needs to use a wheelchair. I can tell the chamber, however, that what James and his family would want us to talk about today is how much James loves his sport. They would want us to talk about how James was cheered home by the crowd at the state championships, and, most of all, they would want us to talk about the fact that at three recent meets James has beaten his personal best on each occasion. That kind of progress and consistency is an achievement that any athlete would be proud of, and, on behalf of all members, I say congratulations to James on your outstanding performances. As we celebrate the International Day of People with Disability, James's story, like those of a great many others like him, remind us of the many ways that people with disability and their families are improving and enriching their own lives.

Mr HILL (Bruce) (17:38): I thank my friend and my neighbour in the corridor, the member for Fisher, for sharing those thoughts and his personal story with us. It is such a worthy topic and is worthy of air time, and there are important issues to discuss. I will be old-fashioned and turn my attention to the words that are actually in front of us in the motion, and start with part (2). Part (2) of the motion is lovely. It calls upon us to recognise and celebrate the winners of the 10th National Disability Awards, and who could argue with that? The awards are there to recognise the outstanding contributions of individuals and organisations in improving the lives of Australians with a disability and in advancing the recognition of equality and human rights for all Australians. The winners include organisations and people who have seen a need and dedicated much of their lives or organisational capacities to meeting it. They highlight the real and meaningful change that can be effected when the barriers to access and inclusion are torn down. Whilst not distracting from people living their everyday lives and the core, important work of government—be it the NDIS, the DSP,

employment and whatever else is needed—they serve a role to inspire, motivate and provide positive role models, where, at times, I think it is fair to say that if you look in the broader mainstream media and elsewhere perhaps those role models are not always as evident as we would wish.

I would like to briefly honour the two Victorian winners. Firstly, Nightlife Disability Services, based in Moorabbin—not in my electorate but nearby—were the joint winner of the Excellence in Inclusive Service Delivery Award. They provide consumer focused mobile care and provide high-quality drop-in and on-call services 365 days a year to support independence and choice. Kairsty Wilson, the legal manager of the AED Legal Centre, based in Melbourne, was the joint winner of the Excellence in Justice and Rights Protection Award. Many other winners were recognised for a wide range of contributions.

But I have to say that, aside from part (2) of the motion, the rest of it is, to my mind, fatuous, platitudinous and drivellous. Indeed, it is fudge, which does not surprise us given that the member for Gilmore often likes to remind us of her previous business, packing fudge. The motion notes that 3 December was the International Day for People with Disability—which was three months ago but, nevertheless, here we are—and it notes 'the important work being done in Australia to support people with disability', whatever that is; it says no more.

I would just like to touch on a couple of issues—firstly, the NDIS, a great Labor reform, introduced and fully funded by Labor. When we look at the history of social reforms in this country, such as Medicare, we see that we put it in and build it and those opposite get rid of it. We put in superannuation and needs based school funding. The debate goes on. We know our side of this debate. But the NDIS was fully funded, and your bad fiscal management is not our responsibility. The first 10 years were fully funded in the 2013-14 budget, and we cannot let that lie be perpetuated over and over again. The measures to fully fund the NDIS were supported by those opposite: the private health rebate, the Medicare levy and a range of other savings measures. But despite this we see mounting government stuff-ups on the NDIS rollout, which should be of great concern: failing to resource the rollout, stuffing up the IT rollout, failing to reach agreement with the states on time, reports about the ACT cap on services, and now threats to the very funding base of the NDIS, which, as the Productivity Commission told us when they provided that seminal report to underpin the design of the scheme, had to be predicated on funding from the budget—not funding from special little accounts or taking five bucks here and there off disability support pensioners, but funded as a mainstream core service of government, just like Medicare, at least under Labor.

Secondly, the disability support pension is critical support for people with a disability unable to work. Of course, again, when you look through history, that disability support pension was introduced by Labor in 1991-92. You might say it replaced the invalid pension, which again was introduced and came into effect in 1910 under the world's very first ever elected majority labour government. I checked my facts there, and it was in fact legislated in 1908 under a coalition government with the support of Labor. I do not mean your coalition; I mean our coalition before we won a majority in our own right.

The motion talks of support for people, but that is at odds with what we are seeing, with the ups and downs in the administration of the disability support pension. There will be more to say on that, I expect, in the future, with the public accounts committee report coming out after our disgraceful public hearings, where the department provided no submission—

unprecedented—and we heard evidence of the cruel reviews targeting profoundly disabled people in state care, asking them to prove their Down syndrome had not been cured. We heard evidence of the process, the timing and medical evidence which is no longer assessed by a medical doctor but by a bureaucrat—and the list goes on.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hastie): I thank the honourable member for those words and also for the mention of fudge. Surprise, surprise! It is Monday afternoon. The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned, and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Queensland Working Women's Service

Ms BUTLER (Griffith) (17:43): I move:

That this House:

- (1) notes the decision of the Fair Work Ombudsman not to fund the work of the Queensland Working Women's Service (QWWS) for vulnerable workers;
- (2) recognises that the QWWS has:
 - (a) been providing free, specialist information, advice and representation to vulnerable women about work related problems since 1994;
 - (b) assisted thousands of women to access information, advice and advocacy in relation to employment matters or concerns, including over 4,000 specialist advisory sessions to vulnerable workers during 2016; and
 - (c) negotiated over \$770,000 by way of settlements for outstanding entitlements or compensation for alleged breaches of industrial and discrimination laws for clients during the 2016 financial year; and
- (3) recognises the important work that the QWWS has been providing to vulnerable Queensland women for over 20 years.

I have known the Queensland Working Women's Service for a very long time. In fact, my association with them dates back to when I was an articled clerk in the early 2000s, and I got to know the Queensland Working Women's Service when Cath Rafferty was the coordinator, which is a very long time ago now. Since I got to know them, I spent my period in legal practice offering their clients either free or heavily discounted legal advice, because I was so impressed by the work the Queensland Working Women's Service did—a not-for-profit organisation with a management committee made up of volunteers and highly professional and impressive staff who were working for pay. In the community sector, pay is not what it is in the private sector, and any of those people could have got a job out in the private sector, but instead they decided to take a discount on their pay and work for a community organisation because of the vocation that they had: wanting to help people who were having trouble at work and particularly women who were having trouble at work. It is important because women tend to have a bit less power at work. They tend to be a bit less unionised and they tend to be a bit more vulnerable to exploitation, particularly women in less skilled occupations or in low-paid occupations. So a service like Queensland Working Women's Service is really important.

Since 1994, Queensland Working Women's Service have been providing assistance to vulnerable women in Queensland about their rights at work, and they have the objective of assisting women to remain in employment and to reduce the risk of poverty, financial hardship or reliance on welfare. They provide assistance to women in all sorts of

circumstances where they are experiencing workplace related issues, like domestic violence, which is an issue at work because, if you have an ex or a partner who is violent towards you, that can manifest in control at work or tracking you down at work. But they have also helped women in all sorts of other situations. Pregnancy discrimination is one. Workplace bullying is another. In fact, Cath Rafferty, whom I mentioned before, led the Queensland task force in relation to workplace bullying in the early 2000s and was instrumental in the workplace health and safety guideline being created as a way for employers to have best practice to avoid bullying in their workplaces.

It should be clear that the service that this organisation provides and has provided since 1994 is invaluable. It is unfortunate, therefore, that there has been a decision by the Fair Work Ombudsman not to fund the Queensland Working Women's Service and a failure by the Turnbull government to provide additional funding to it. Consequently, I regret to advise that the service has announced that it will be looking at closure on 8 March, which is regrettable—and isn't it ironic that, on International Women's Day, a service that has been providing these supports for women since 1994 will have to close unless it is funded?

I wanted to rise in this place today to raise concerns about this decision not to fund the Queensland Working Women's Service. In 2016 alone, this service assisted over 1,000 women to get access to information, advice and advocacy on their behalf in relation to employment matters or concerns, including over 4,000 specialist advisory sessions for vulnerable workers. In that one year, the service negotiated over \$770,000 by way of settlements for outstanding entitlements or compensation for alleged breaches of industrial and discrimination laws for their clients. All of these services were provided free of charge to the most vulnerable women in our community. Over the period 2015-16 most of the inquiries were about unfair dismissal, at 42 per cent, followed by discrimination, at 28 per cent, and workplace harassment and bullying, at 25 per cent.

The Prime Minister says that he believes that, when a woman is empowered, the whole economy, the whole community, benefits. That should also mean that he wants to see women being empowered. Unfortunately that does mean providing support to women who are vulnerable and who are in trouble at work. So the Queensland Working Women's Service need some action and they need it now. They feel abandoned by the federal government because of this decision to not fund them. They have made very clear that they are looking at having to close their doors. The Northern Territory and South Australian chapters have also had their federal funding cut, through the Fair Work Ombudsman, but they have received funding through a separate grant, whereas Queensland have not. This is a very specific issue for people in Queensland. This will leave a great big hole in the support that is available to women in vulnerable situations who are vulnerable to exploitation. It is a wrong and it should be righted by this government.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hastie): Is there a seconder for this motion?

Ms LAMB (Longman) (17:48): I second the motion. I support the member for Griffith's motion condemning the government's refusal to fund the work of the Queensland Working Women's Service. I am disgusted that the current government continues its attack on working women. Quite frankly, I am sick of just expecting it now. But what really could you expect from a government whose Minister for Women thinks that feminism is done and dusted?

What more could you expect from a government that does not understand that not everyone just happens to find their way into parliament; who does not understand that there are countless hardworking women who have been let down by the system time and time again; and that there are women who are abused, bullied, harassed and discriminated against in their workplaces? What more could you expect from a government that welcomes cutting the take-home pay of working women, working in retail and hospitality? What more could you expect from a government that has just lost touch?

This government's refusal to fund the Queensland Working Women's Service, whose more than 22 years of extraordinary work in providing free specialist information, advice and representation to vulnerable women, means their doors will be forced to close in just a few weeks time.

The Queensland Working Women's Service have already cut back from their original 15 centres across Queensland to just one phone and one email hotline run by seven staff, despite receiving somewhere between 12 and 20 concerns a day. In the 2016 financial year alone, as the member for Griffith said, the Queensland Working Women's Service secured over \$770,000 in unpaid entitlements and compensation. Just imagine the good we could do with support from a government that actually does care, if that is what we can achieve with a government who has lost touch.

Let's remember this is a government who refuses to support victims of abuse with paid domestic violence leave—refuses to support them. Not only have they refused to help these victims but Senator Cash recently was so bold, so callous, as to say that helping these women would actually stop employers from hiring women—absolutely atrocious. This reasoning defies all logic. If supporting people through some of the most difficult times in their lives causes workplace discrimination, then is that not just yet another reason for services like Queensland Working Women's Service to actually exist?

Just this week, I spoke with the Queensland Working Women's Service director Kerriann Dear. Kerrieann really opened my eyes to the types of complex issues and cases that the service has worked upon—and I am sure the member for Griffith would be able to add to some of these stories that Kerriann spoke to me about.

One story in particular was about a migrant worker—a lady from Korea—who came to Australia to work as a chef. In her workplace, she suffered insidious abuse. She was sexually harassed on multiple occasions, not just once, was told repeatedly that, if she left or spoke out about her abusers, her visa would not be sponsored. This woman's entire life was held to ransom and, because of it, she suffered post-traumatic stress disorder. This is not a stand-alone case, as Kerriann Dear told me; there are women all over Australia who suffer at the hands of their employers, and it is these women who need help from services like the Queensland Working Women's Service.

Ms Dear went on to tell me that, despite our population predominantly living in metropolitan centres, over 65 per cent of the cases in Queensland come from regional areas—regional areas like my seat of Longman, just north of Brisbane, seats like Herbert in North Queensland, and women calling home places like Redcliffe and Deception Bay in the electorates of Dickson and Petrie.

Who does this government think that these women can turn to, if they cut these critical services? It is not like these services can be resolved in a matter of days. They are quite complex. Sometimes it takes weeks. Many of these cases can actually take months. Right now there are women who have started the process of getting support, getting help and having advocacy work done for them who are now going to have their hopes dashed by a government who has let the funding expire before these women get a resolution.

Opposition leader Bill Shorten recently said:

There is no such thing as trickle-down feminism—

and I absolutely agree. Just talking about inequality does not fix anything. We have to build equality from the ground up. We have to fight for the most vulnerable and the most disadvantaged. We need services like Ms Dear and Queensland Working Women's Service to stand beside us and to fight with us. Thank you.

Ms CHESTERS (Bendigo) (17:54): I rise to also speak in favour of the motion and wish that there were services like this all over the country. Learning about the great work that the Queensland Working Women's Service is doing for the women of Queensland makes me wish we had one in Bendigo. It makes me wish that we had a service like this for regional women all over our country.

As the previous speakers have said, women living in regional areas rely heavily upon the service. Just this one statistic alone speaks to the strength and the importance of this service. Over the 2015-16 period, the majority of inquiries received by the Queensland Working Women's Service were concerned with unfair, unlawful and invalid dismissals—42 per cent of the inquiries they received, followed by 28 per cent of inquiries being about discrimination and 25 per cent about workplace harassment.

We have not reached gender equality yet in our country. It is still a daily prospect for women working that they face harassment in their workplaces because of their gender. Yet a service which is helping to address this, a service which is providing much-needed legal advice and advocacy for the women experiencing this discrimination or harassment is about to close its doors because this government and the Fair Work Ombudsman have not continued their funding.

This service has also supported women in recovering money owed to them, over \$770,000 by way of settlement. We know the statistics: the number of women who go without super because their employer has not paid and the number of women who have accepted low pay, not realising what they were legally entitled to or fearing losing the job. This service has helped them—over 4,000 cases supporting women in these situations.

If only other services achieved the outcomes of these statistics. There is a need for this service to continue in Queensland. It is a large state. It stretches from Brisbane to Cairns, which is like stretching from Brisbane down to Melbourne. It is a large state, with great distances between support for many of these women, so having a reliable phone service is vital. People in regional electorates understand this. If you are a woman living in Echuca, it is harder to seek advice and support than for a woman in Bendigo or in Melbourne. That is why it is so disappointing that this government is going after this vital service which is supporting women.

We know that we still have a lot of work to do in terms of the gender pay gap in our country. Through its work, the statistics it collects and who it helps, this service helps to highlight the gender pay gap within our community. This is more than just statistics, however. This is also the real case of women being taken advantage of by their employers. It is only through advocacy and support like that of the Queensland Working Women's Service that we will continue to break down the gender barriers that exist within our workplaces.

We have seen more recently in a number of our states, a growing number of young worker centres modelled on this model that we have in Queensland. In Victoria the Young Workers Centre is helping young workers—also there is South Australia and Tasmania. These services help to connect people to the advice and the support that they need to stand up against exploitation, harassment and discrimination.

We still have women who go to work in hospitality and in retail not only having had a blow in terms of a pay cut but also having been told to suck it up when it comes to harassment. They are told harassment is part of the job; they are told to tie a knot in the front of their shirt or to wear short shorts because that will sell more beers. When we still have women being asked to put on certain outfits to attract male clients then we still have gender inequality and we still have a need for services like this service.

I call on the government to at least do one good thing for working women today: restore the funding so that this service can continue and, in fact, expand it so that women in states like my state of Victoria can access the same services.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hastie): There being no further speakers, the debate is adjourned. Resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Remembrance Day

Mr TIM WILSON (Goldstein) (17:59): I move:

That this House:

(1) notes that:

- (a) on Friday 11 November, Australia commemorates Remembrance Day;
- (b) the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month is a significant anniversary for this country as it signifies the ending of a war where over 60,000 Australians lost their lives;
- (c) of these 60,000, over 16,900 Australians remain unknown or unaccounted for on the Western Front;
- (d) it is on Remembrance Day that the body of an unknown Australian soldier from the Western Front was laid to rest in the Hall of Memories at the Australian War Memorial; and
- (e) in July 2016 six formerly unknown Australian soldiers were given headstone dedications at the Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery;

(2) acknowledges:

- (a) that many communities across the country pause to remember the sacrifice of Australian service men and women; and
- (b) the significance of this day to all unknown Australians killed in action; and

(3) notes that during the 'Century of Service' that is occurring between 2014 and 2018 Australians are given a chance to remember the service and sacrifice of all who fought during World War I.

I will start by acknowledging your service, Mr Deputy Speaker Hastie, to our great country and saying how appropriate it is that you are in the chair for the moving of this motion. I am humbled to stand today to reflect upon those who gave their lives and service in defence of our freedom.

The outbreak of the First World War, in 1914, saw for the first time Australia, as its own nation, enter a major conflict. Volunteers rushed to enlist in this seemingly exciting war that was expected to be over by Christmas. Many of these volunteers were from the Goldstein community.

The first independent military operation carried out by Australia was the occupation of German New Guinea. The Australian Naval and Military Expeditionary Force were dispatched in an attempt to destroy all German wireless stations and coaling stations in the Pacific. This force of only 1,000 men included Arthur Morely of Pine Grove, Bentleigh, in my electorate. This operation was expected to take about six months but ultimately took less than one.

For four more terribly long years Australians found themselves battling a war in which 60,000 Australians were killed and 156,000 more were wounded, gassed or taken prisoner. It was not until the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918 that the guns finally felt silent on the Great War. Every year on the anniversary of this important moment we come together as a nation to commemorate those who made the ultimate sacrifice for the love of our country and the freedoms that we strive to uphold and honour. And we continue to honour them.

In Goldstein the Bentleigh RSL has written a local history book, *Serving Then, Serving Still*. It recounts the history of service to Australian involvements in war. The book details the 31 men from the area who gave up their youth and future during the war to end all wars. Five were lost for their service at Gallipoli. Ernest Beadle from Thomas Street in Bentleigh was killed in the Battle of Lone Pine, whilst Joseph Burgess was to die later of wounds received in the battle. George Shores of Pine Grove and Eric Smith of Patterson Road, Bentleigh, lost their lives due to the hardships of trench life. It took Lawrence Brewster from Buckingham Avenue two years to succumb to the wounds he received during the charge of the light horse.

Three more RSLs serve veterans in Highett, Sandringham and Caulfield—those like Captain Robert Grieve, from Brighton, who won the Victoria Cross for knocking out a concealed machine-gun post during the Battle of Messines. Captain Grieve's Victoria Cross is unusual in that it was conferred on the recommendation of his men, not the recommendation of officers. Captain Grieve later donated his Victoria Cross to his beloved Wesley College in Elsternwick.

Maurice Buckley was awarded the Victoria Cross while serving under the pseudonym Gerald Sexton. Sergeant Buckley is now buried at Brighton cemetery under his correct name with his fellow Victoria Cross recipient Warrant Officer Class 2 Walter Peeler. Both Sexton and Wally, as he was affectionately known, rest beside the great Australian Sir John Monash, who is an eternal constituent of Brighton cemetery.

There are so many others who served: Ralph Wollmer of Cheltenham, who served in the Korean War and serves on the committee of the Korean Veterans Association of Australia; John Moller from Beaumaris, who served in Korea and Vietnam and later as President of the

Victorian Subsection of the Naval Association of Australia; John Douglas of Sandringham, who organises local Anzac Day marches; Steve Kyritsis of Black Rock, who served in Vietnam and is President of the Hellenic RSL; Grant Coultman-Smith OAM of Beaumaris, the former president of Beaumaris RSL; importantly, Major General David McLaughlin, who is a Beaumaris resident and retired head of RSL Victoria; Ambrose Crowe of Beaumaris, who served in Vietnam; Errol Driver, Terry Black and George Logan, who all served in Vietnam; Ted Moorcroft, Mac Roberts and Roy Watts, who served in World War II; Ian Liley, who served in New Guinea; and Chris Spence of Beaumaris, a retired air vice marshal and the current Chairman of Trustees of the Shrine of Remembrance. These people served amongst many other men and women of the Goldstein community, the Victorian community and, of course, the Australian community who stood proud and tall.

Today it is our turn to stand proud and tall in remembering and honouring the service and sacrifice of all who fought for our country and those who will do so in future in defence of our freedom. We are eternally grateful for their sacrifice and their preparedness to put a love of country ahead of themselves. For that we must always remember the eternal words 'lest we forget'.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hastie): I thank the honourable member for his contribution. Is the motion seconded?

Mr ROB MITCHELL (McEwen) (18:04): I second the motion. I rise to emphasise the importance of the nation's moment of reflection at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month every year. Remembrance Day is the day we commemorate the end of World War I and the loss of over 60,000 Australian lives. Our thoughts go to those 16,900 Australians who remain unknown or unaccounted for on the Western Front, those whose memories we honour and continue to honour through the body of an unknown Australian soldier laid to rest in the Hall of Memory. Every community in Australia has its own story, its own legacy and its own connection to the men and women who served and sacrificed in World War I.

The electorate of McEwen has one of the oldest and longest military histories in Australia. I work closely with our community to uphold the legacy founded in McEwen ensuring that we remember our rich military heritage. On Remembrance Day last year, the World War I memorial park at the Seymour District Memorial Hospital was unveiled after extensive efforts to preserve and refurbish it. We worked with the Seymour RSL to redo the gates at the entrance to the beautiful park. The park brings together people from all over the region including 11-year-old Sarah Moad whose poem sits proudly on a bronze plaque in front of a lone pine. I had the privilege of reading Sarah's poem in this chamber recently and was amazed by her bold words in honouring Lone Pine.

McEwen is home to so many reminders of our Australian soldiers, with our Vietnam Veterans Commemorative Walk, the Light Horse Memorial Park and the almost completed Craigieburn Centennial Park making just a few of our memorials. Of course, we cannot forget our military training facilities at Puckapunyal in Seymour which have served Australia for over a hundred years. Seymour has a military history starting back in the late 1800s and it continues to be its crowning glory even today. The Seymour camp was used as a training, holding, isolation and overflow camp during the build-up of the Australian Imperial Force. The camp was used throughout World War I to form and reinforce both infantry battalions

and Light Horse regiments. The men of the 8th Light Horse Regiment became soldiers in Seymour before sacrificing themselves on the Nek at the attack in Gallipoli.

Some of those troops whose legacy lives on through the story of the charge of Beersheba in 1917 started their journeys in Seymour. To anyone who has had the chance to go to Beersheba and see the graves that are there, it really sticks in your throat when you start looking at young boys from the ages of 16 right through to men in their 40s lying in graves a long way from home, and I guess a long way from where they planned to be in their lives—I do not think anyone expects to go to war and not come home. This is a magnificent place of reflection and I appreciated the opportunity to go there and have a look for myself. As I said, the Seymour camp served as our largest military base in Victoria until Puckapunyal was built before the beginning of World War II. So both of these locations were at the heart of Victorian and Australian military training making McEwen home to so many soldiers past, present and into the future.

I have been lucky to be part of this history, observing a one hundred year strong friendship between the French towns of Villers-Bretonneux and our own town of Strathewen. On April 24 1918, 1,200 brave Australians fought to liberate the town of Villers-Bretonneux from the Germans. Our Aussies saved the town but the fighting destroyed the local school, so the children of Victoria started a campaign: 'By diggers defended, by Victorians mended.' The campaign raised 10,000 pounds sterling to rebuild the Villers-Bretonneux school which was matched by the Victorian education department. Above every blackboard in the French school, a simple phrase reminds us of the importance of the history we share: 'Never forget Australia.' It is a symbol of a promise made long before the current students were born. The loyalty between those two towns was shown again in 2009 when disaster struck in our own backyard and the school at Strathewen was burnt down by the Black Saturday bushfires. To express their gratitude and to strengthen the connection between our two towns, the people of Villers-Bretonneux raised \$20,000 for the Black Saturday bushfire appeal. They were deeply humbled that the Villers-Bretonneux school along with two other schools, a kindergarten and a town council pledged to help fund the rebuilding of Strathewen Primary School.

The legacy of this war goes on in the hearts and minds of all those in our community. Only recently in July 2016, six formerly unknown soldiers were given headstone dedications at the Fromelles military cemetery as sign that we have never forgotten and we will never forget. We, as Australians, will never forget those who fought for our country. In this Century of Service, we pledge wholeheartedly to honour the sacrifice of all those who fought during World War I. Lest we forget.

Honourable members: Lest we forget.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hastie): I thank the honourable member and, having spent a lot of time in McEwen driving around Puckapunyal, you have evoked very fond memories. Thank you.

Mr PITT (Hinkler—Assistant Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment) (18:10): The last shot of World War I was fired at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month in 1918. There were 300,000 Australians that went to the Great War; 60,000 died and 156,000 were wounded or taken prisoner. More than a third of those who died have no known grave.

In Australia, on the 75th anniversary of the Armistice in 1993, the remains of an unknown Australian soldier, exhumed from a First World War military cemetery in France, were ceremonially entombed in the Australian War Memorial's Hall of Memory. In July last year, six formerly unknown Australian soldiers were given headstone dedications at Fromelles, including a soldier from my electorate.

James Benson, who was born in Bundaberg, was killed at the Battle of Fromelles on 19 July 1916. He was married, employed as a linesman and lived in Cheltenham in South Australia. Private Benson enlisted in the Australian Army on 5 July 1915 and was attached to the 32nd Battalion A Company. The remains of Second Lieutenant Benson were identified in 2016 by the Australian Army's Unrecovered War Casualties Fromelles project, a team that is trying to identify 250 Australian and British World War I soldiers found in a mass grave that was discovered in 2009 at Pheasant Wood near Fromelles. Second Lieutenant Benson's name was unveiled at Fromelles at a ceremony as part of the 100th anniversary of the Battle of Fromelles.

The Battle of Fromelles, west of Lille in France, lasted just 24 hours and was the first major engagement of Australian soldiers on the Western Front in 1916. In the battle, the Australian 5th Division suffered 5,533 casualties in just 24 hours. It is Australia's bloodiest single day in military history.

I sincerely hope the identification of Second Lieutenant Benson brought some peace and comfort to his family. We have never forgotten the service of Australians who fought and died in the First World War. We should reflect on the sacrifice of Second Lieutenant Benson, who was one of 45,000 who lost their lives in World War I on the Western Front. We honour those men and their families 100 years later by finding out who they were and marking their graves. The Australian Army's Unrecovered War Casualties Fromelles project team has identified the names of 150 soldiers discovered in 2009, while 70 Australians are still unidentified.

The electorate of Hinkler is fortunate to have a very strong and active veteran population, one that is much larger than average. The Department of Veterans' Affairs currently provides direct financial support to almost 4,200 Hinkler residents. I would like to make mention of one local veteran, who has been a stalwart of the Bundaberg community for many decades: Tom McLucas OAM. Tom is now 91 and fought in the Second World War in the 2/24 Infantry Battalion. It was one of the four front battalions in the First Battle of Alamein. It was with the 2/48 Battalion, and solely defeated German general Rommel. In the Second Battle of Alamein, 720 of his battalion fought. Only 52 remained standing after the battle.

When he returned home, he devoted himself to the RSL, disabled veterans and the Legacy Pensions Committee for eight years. He spent 11 years as an advocate and was involved at a sub-branch, district, state and national level for 60-plus years. He has been granted honorary RSL state life vice-president, district and Bundaberg sub-branch honorary life vice-president, RSL Gold Badge life membership and Meritorious Service Medal, as well as an Order of Australia Medal, a British Empire Medal and an RSL bicentennial medal.

Tom is currently in hospital after a fall and doing it fairly tough. He is a gentleman that I see at every dawn service and in the afternoon at Burnett Heads, and I certainly wish him well. It is important that we keep the memory alive of service personnel like Tom and educate

the next generation about the service and sacrifice made by men and women throughout the theatres of war.

The southern end of the electorate at Hervey Bay has had the honour of being chosen as one of three locations in regional Australia to host the international exhibition, *The Belgians have not Forgotten*. It was a year ago that I met with Belgian ambassador, His Excellency Jean-Luc Bodson in my office in Canberra to discuss bringing this exhibition to the bay. The ambassador had visited Freedom Park for the Centenary of Anzac memorial in 2014 and was impressed with the proud returned services community in the region. At the ceremony, he said:

We often have Australian visitors to our memorials and shrines, and I assure you that Belgium doesn't forget.

The exhibition demonstrates that the words spoken by the ambassador still ring true today and that the strong relationship continues between the people of Belgium and the people of Australia. The exhibition features wartime artefacts, photographs, maps and film footage from the Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917 in Zonnebeke in Belgium.

I encourage residents to visit the exhibition and tell family and friends about it. It is a very rare opportunity to have an exhibition of this scale in Hervey Bay, and people have already travelled from various locations to see it. I would certainly like to thank all of those involved—the Memorial Museum Passchendaele 1917, the Zonnebeke council, the Flemish government, the Embassy of the Kingdom of Belgium in Australia and, lastly, the Australian government. Lest we forget.

Ms BRODTMANN (Canberra) (18:15): I want to take this opportunity to thank the member for Goldstein for this private member's motion. Not a single community across Australia was spared the tragedy of the First World War. No matter where you go across this great nation, be it Thursday Island, be it Norfolk Island, be it a country town, be it a remote centre or be it a bustling metropolis, there stands an avenue of trees or a memorial remembering those men and women who made the ultimate sacrifice in the many wars that Australia has participated in—the Boer War, the First World War, the Second World War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, Iraq or Afghanistan. And, of course, they are all honoured, including the unknown soldiers, here in our nation's great capital at the Australian War Memorial—a memorial that according to CEW Bean is 'a monument to great-hearted men', because, to quote him:

What these men did nothing can alter now. The good and the bad, the greatness and smallness of their story will stand ... It rises, as it always will rise, above the mists of time, a monument to great-hearted men; and, for their nation, a possession for ever.

In speaking on this motion, we remember those who made the ultimate sacrifice, those who have been identified and those unknown soldiers and we also remember the women—the mothers who were crippled with grief after losing their sons, sometimes more than one; the wives who lost their husbands and never remarried; the fiancées whose weddings were never celebrated, whose dresses were mothballed, whose hearts were broken; the fathers, the sisters, the brothers and the friends. And we remember the children—the children who had to bear the pall of grief cast over their home and family, who had to witness mothers whose lives had been shattered, fearful of their future, fearful of their security; the children who lost their fathers, or whose fathers returned from war broken, with missing limbs, or minds filled with

confusion and rage and images of death, and with impossibly busy heads filled with demons. In remembering the tens of thousands who made the ultimate sacrifice, we must also remember those hundreds of thousands who came home, and have come home, wounded, be it physically or mentally. We must, as a nation, commit ourselves to providing every possible support to those who have served our country and have been injured in the process, be it mentally or physically.

Last week, I joined with the member for Herbert in Townsville to meet with the Quine group. I had met a number of the members of the group last year when I held a roundtable on the antimalarial drug mefloquine. As with last year, the trauma of the group was palpable. Along with my colleague the shadow Minister for Veterans' Affairs, I continue to urge the government to listen to these people, and not just listen to them but to actually hear them. I continue to urge the government to reach out to these people in a genuine and meaningful way. Last year, the government committed to address concerns about mefloquine in four ways: it committed to community consultation to provide an open dialogue between DVA and Defence; it committed to a comprehensive online resource; it committed to a dedicated mefloquine support team; and it committed to an interdepartmental DVA-Defence Links Committee to discuss the issues and provide advice to the government by November 2016.

From last week's discussions, it would appear the consultation has all been one way and more a process of providing information from Defence to the community rather than a genuine open dialogue. The online resource is just a one-way information source, not a resource, and the hotline, I understand, does not operate for 24 hours and some people have found it very difficult to get through. November 2016 has been and gone, and if the advice from the committee has been given to the government it has not been made public. I urge the government to reach out to the Quinn group and other groups on the mefloquine issue. By reaching out, I mean listening to them, hearing them, and learning about their pain, their suffering and their heartbreak. We must care for and support all Australians who have served our country. Lest we forget. We will remember them.

Mr IRONS (Swan) (18:20): Mr Deputy Speaker Hastie, I too rise to support this important motion and thank the member for Goldstein and the other members of parliament who are speaking on this motion. I also take this opportunity to acknowledge your service to your country overseas in the theatres you served in.

The motion before the House today is about a date of great importance for our nation and its history. In mid-October of 1918, the Allied forces advanced and fractures showed between the Central Powers. By the end of the month, Turkey had signed an armistice, and Austria-Hungary quickly followed only days later. Germany felt the immense pressures of war and its power began to implode, with the Kaiser finally abdicating on 9 November. At 5 am on 11 November, the final armistice was signed, calling for an immediate cessation of fighting along the Western Front at 1100 hours. So, at the 11th hour of the 11th day of the 11th month, after four brutal and bloody years of conflict, the Great War had ended.

No-one could have predicted the casualty rate of the First World War. Losses were heavy and gains were small. The war saw the mobilisation of over 70 million people, and around 17 million soldiers and civilians were killed. As many as one-third of these were left with no known grave. In addition to this loss, a further 20 million were wounded. From Australia, with a population of less than five million at the time, 416,809 Australian men enlisted, of

whom 60,000 were killed. Over 16,900 Australians remain unknown or unaccounted for on the Western Front. A further 156,000 Australians were wounded, gassed or taken prisoner. The Australian War Memorial notes that for Australia the First World War remains the costliest conflict in terms of deaths and casualties.

As weapons were laid down on 11 November, the Allied nations chose this day to remember and commemorate those lost at war. It remains a significant day for all Australians, as communities across the country, from small towns to big cities, pause to remember the sacrifice of Australian servicemen and servicewomen. The period from 2014 to 2018 marks the Century of Service, a time where Australians are given a chance to remember the service and sacrifice of all who fought during World War I. The Battle of Fromelles on 19 July 1916 was the first key engagement of our Australian soldiers on the Western Front. The Australian Fifth Division suffered 5,533 casualties in the first 24 hours, making it Australia's single most bloody day in our military history. Almost 300,000 Australians served on the Western Front. Forty-five thousand Australians lost their lives, and more than one-third of those have no known grave. In July of last year, six formerly unknown Australian soldiers were given headstone dedications at the Fromelles (Pheasant Wood) Military Cemetery. It allowed us as Australians to recognise the sacrifices they made and the hardships they endured to make this nation what it is today.

Closer to home, in my electorate of Swan, the City of Belmont remembers Private Robert William Mellor of Belgravia Street in Belmont. Private Mellor enlisted in the Australian Imperial Force on 4 September 1916 and left for France in the following June. Only three months later, Private Mellor was killed in action. He was shot by a sniper while delivering ammunition to the front line. Private Mellor's name can be found on the City of Belmont's War Memorial in Faulkner Park, alongside the names of 33 other soldiers from the Belmont district who also lost their lives in the Great War. In 2015 the memorial was upgraded after the City of Belmont successfully secured \$50,000 from the federal government as part of the Anzac Centenary Local Grants Program. The funding contributed to a \$280,000 upgrade project which saw the installation of ramps, additional flagpoles and panels for commemorative plaques. The Belmont War Memorial, originally erected in 1923 to commemorate those that lost their lives in the Great War, now recognises the service and the sacrifices of all our men and women who have been directly involved with all the wars and conflicts that have followed.

Similarly, the Victoria Park RSL sub branch also received \$50,000, which saw the erection of a memorial wall to honour those residents of the town of Victoria Park who enlisted or volunteered for active service during the First World War. That particular RSL is on Fred Bell Parade, named for a Western Australian who won his VC for valour in action in the Second Boer War and then went on to fight in the First World War, so he is proudly recognised by the town of Victoria Park.

So, on this Remembrance Day past and on 11 November this year, I pay my respects and give thanks to all of our servicepeople for what they have done and continue to do for our nation, its values and our freedoms. I am confident all those present in this chamber will join with me in doing so. Lest we forget.

Mr GOSLING (Solomon) (18:25): I thank the member for Goldstein for his Remembrance Day motion. Remembrance Day services are very moving events. From

listening to some of the contributions today, we are reminded of all that we remember on Remembrance Day. Services are held around the country to mark the time when the guns on the Western Front fell silent after all the slaughter and the carnage. We use Remembrance Day to honour and remember the fallen and those left behind. Like you, Deputy Speaker Hastie, I am a proud former defence member. I am also the son of Vietnam veteran who lost some mates and the grandson of a World War II veteran who lost some mates. In recent times I have spent a lot of time with veterans and their families.

Recently in the Top End a great event was put on by the Defence Community Organisation to welcome new families to Darwin. We also commemorated the 75th anniversary of the bombing of Darwin. So, in the short space of a couple of weeks, there have been a lot of opportunities for defence families and veterans to get together and talk. What has really struck me is that we have a serious problem in our country when it comes to how our veterans are going.

Do not get me wrong: the majority of our veterans are soldiering on. They are either still in the Army, Navy or Air Force or they have got out of the military and are just trying to get on with life. Many are going into different workplaces and doing incredibly well because of the skills, attitudes and knowledge they have picked up during their service. I recommend soldiers, sailors and airmen to any prospective employer. There is no doubt that a percentage of those in the veterans' community are having some troubles. In my seat of Solomon and in Palmerston, I am struck at how few mental health services there are for these veterans. A lot of families and even some veterans who have been personally affected have come up to me basically asking for help.

The reality is that you have to fly interstate from Darwin if you want to get some focused psychiatric care. Often that is away from your family, which is difficult for people. I think we can do better. A lot of people in our community who were in the emergency services or who are veterans are suffering from post-traumatic stress or anxiety or depression. In the Top End we probably need a program that is veteran-specific, that has focused psychiatric rehabilitation at its core, with health professionals that understand PTSD. I think that is something we can work towards. I want to acknowledge the families, because obviously they often bear the brunt, not only those families who have lost someone but those families who have had someone come back to them who is not the same as they were before.

I spoke today to a widow who is a member of the ACT War Widows' Guild, and they have commissioned a glass work that will go to the new Canberra Services Club. I thought it would be fitting to read out the inscription on that stained-glass window:

We all belong to each other. We all need each other. It is in serving each other and in sacrificing for our common good that we are finding our true life.

They are beautiful words. On Remembrance Day we honour the dead and we remember the living. Lest we forget.

Mr BUCHHOLZ (Wright) (18:30): I rise to associate myself with the comments of the previous speakers on this motion about Remembrance Day that is before the House at the moment. Unlike the families of other members that have made a contribution in this chamber today, my family were not participants in any great war. We do not have, around our dining table, stories of grandfathers or uncles not coming back. I feel that there are many families in Australia and in my electorate that are in the same situation. But I ask the question of the

House: with all these families like mine that do not have an affinity or connection through a personal contribution, why is it that we are seeing an increase in numbers at ceremonies for Remembrance Day and Anzac Day? I suggest that the Australian public are rolling out in great numbers because there is an enormous amount of work being done by Veterans' Affairs and RSLs in our community, and that is touching a lot of families, and that Australians more generally see the benefit and know that they now sleep under a blanket of security that those fallen soldiers have made for our nation.

Recently I had the pleasure of visiting Laidley, in the western part of my electorate, where we made a presentation of \$34,000 to our veterans' affairs association to upgrade their kitchen and their clubhouse. These are incredible people who go about their business quietly in my community and work behind the scenes offering support to each other. Some of the stories they will tell you about the aftermath of their personal encounters, of their suffering as a result of their combat or service, are truly horrifying. I am proud that, as a community, we reach out and we put our arms around these people—and a lot of the problems that are out there are still unknown.

I wanted to rise and just let the House be aware that you do not have to have strong linkages or walk up the road with a medal on you to appreciate the work that has been done by the proud ex-service men and women of our nation. In closing, I would just like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of those in my electorate who have made a contribution, because, as I mentioned earlier on, it is that contribution that you have made to our nation that provides the blanket of security that we sleep under today. Lest we forget.

Mr ZAPPIA (Makin) (18:33): On the eleventh hour of 11 November 1918 an armistice was called and the so-called Great War came to an end, at least for some. For the Armenians, the Assyrians and the Pontian Greeks, the suffering, the torment and indeed the dying continued right through to 1923. The casualties of the Great War were 17 million dead, of whom seven million were civilians, and 20 million wounded. Australian casualties were 60,000 killed and 156,000 wounded. They are the worst losses of any kind in our nation's history. In fact, if you add together the casualties of all the wars after that, you still do not get to those losses.

On Remembrance Day we stop to remember those losses and the suffering that families right across the country endured. But we should also think about the value of living in peace and how over the centuries the greed and selfish egos of individuals have too often caused so much misery to others. It still happens today. For Australia, the end of World War I saw a new dawning. Not only did RSLs start to spring up around the country but we saw soldier settlements established right around the country. For many of the new migrants who came subsequently, those soldier settlements became their new home—just as right now, in South Australia's Riverland, one of those soldier settlements has become the home to many of the Indian people who have come here from their own country.

Remembrance Day is also the time to acknowledge all of the Australians who have served our nation over the years. It is something we do not do well enough in this country. A week ago I attended a 75th anniversary of the bombing of Darwin service at the Salisbury RSL. The member for Port Adelaide and the member for Wakefield joined me at that service. As we know, 240 lives were lost as a result of the bombing of Darwin, and the bombings continued for some 19 months afterwards. The Darwin Defenders were formed and military personnel

and civilians both took part in security operations. Jeffrey Marr was one of those defenders. He enlisted immediately after the bombing of Darwin and in the months that followed he drove a truck in convoy carting 44-gallon drums of fuel from Alice Springs to Darwin. With the Japanese bombings continuing right across Northern Australia, he and his fellow drivers were under constant threat and risk of life. Yet his family's requests for recognition of Jeffrey's qualifying service have been denied and continue to be denied. In another example, in the Vietnam War Able Seaman Michael Ey risked his life as a naval diver to find and disengage explosives placed by the enemy in the vicinity of US naval vessels. Michael Ey's bravery was recognised by the US, who awarded him the Bronze Star—but no recognition by the Australian government.

The military awards system is failing our defence personnel, and we need to do better. There are many other cases that I could allude to and that at times I have taken up with various ministers ever since I have been in this place—on most occasions without any success whatsoever. Yet, having listened to these individual accounts of what these people did in service to this nation, it beggars belief that we do not afford them the recognition that I believe they are entitled to and that they deservedly should be granted. Perhaps this is a matter for another time.

Finally, I also want to acknowledge those people who served in the Korean War. Their service is often overlooked. Over 17,000 Australians served in the Korean War—340 were killed and 1,216 were wounded. Quite often when we speak in this place, and when I go to other services, including RSL functions, it seems that the Korean War is perhaps touched on but never given the recognition that it ought to be. In fact, the Battle of Kapyong, which saw 32 Australians killed and 53 wounded, could be described as a heroic effort that in some ways could be compared to the Battle of Long Tan—which we do acknowledge each year, certainly in my part of Adelaide. We have done that for many years, and rightly so—but we should be doing the same thing with other battles. There are other examples I would dearly love to touch on, but today we are talking about Remembrance Day. Every community in this country that I know has borne the pain of war—that is why Remembrance Day is so important.

Mr HASTIE (Canning) (18:38): I support and commend the member for Goldstein for moving this motion on Remembrance Day. It is very important that we remember those who have given their lives in the service of our country. In Australia we have remembrance everywhere. We have memorials, we have plaques; most small country towns have a memorial at the heart of their township which reminds us of the sacrifice that many have made.

I was struck by the amount of sacrifice this country made in World War I when I first visited the Western Front in 2004 with a group of Australian Defence Force Academy cadets. I was one of those cadets at the time. We visited Passchendaele, the Somme and Villers-Bretonneux—the mayor there popped champagne for us, very generously. We got to go to the school and Moquet Farm. It was the first time it had really hit me how much blood and treasure this country committed in World War I. There were 60,000 war dead.

Prime Minister Billy Hughes, at the Paris Peace Conference, stood up to President Woodrow Wilson and demanded heavy reparations from Germany—only to be denied by the President of the United States. He then replied: 'I speak for 60,000 war dead. Who do you

speak for?' Well he might have said those words, because it is not until you get over there that you really appreciate how significant that sacrifice was.

Many young men who might have become parliamentarians, who might have returned to Australia and become doctors or teachers or factory workers, fathers, husbands—all those things that we look forward to in life—were denied these at a very young age. I think of all the women, some of the nurses who perished and the many nurses who served for four years treating our wounded. They are often overlooked, so it was greatly satisfying a couple of weeks ago to remember the nurses of Bangka Island who gave their lives 75 years ago. They were massacred—21 of them—by Japanese soldiers in a brutal war crime.

Then I think of those who survived the war, those who were crippled—psychologically, emotionally, mentally—with wounds that never heal. I think of my own grandfather in World War II who was shot on 31 March 1945 and kept alive only by a US medic aboard the plane he was flying and then a US surgeon on Morotai Island. He is someone who was scarred by that moment. He would never admit it and he never really talked about it, but I am sure he suffered from what we would call PTSD today.

At home in Canning we have remembrance all throughout my electorate. The township of Byford has a wonderful war memorial, and I was part of the ceremony there on Anzac Day last year. There is Pinjarra in central Canning. At Mandurah we have a beautiful war memorial overlooking the water. And then there are little towns like Coolup with only a couple of hundred people. Coolup is a town that has given much in the service of this country.

I think, particularly, of two constituents of mine, Mr and Mrs Bernie and Myrna McDonald, whose son gave his life on 30 August 2012: Lance Corporal Mervyn John McDonald of the 2nd Commando Regiment. Every time I see them I am reminded of that sacrifice. Lest we forget.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Craig Kelly): I thank the member for Canning, and I thank all members who have contributed to the debate on both sides of the House. The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Schools

Consideration resumed of the motion:

That this House:

(1) notes the Government's failure in school education policy, including:

(a) a cut of \$30 billion from schools (*Budget 2014-15 Overview*, 13 May 2014, page 7), breaking an election promise to match Labor's funding plan dollar for dollar;

(b) a proposal to cut all federal funding from public schools; and

(c) tearing up agreements negotiated by the previous Labor Government, that required states and territories to:

(i) maintain and grow their funding for schools, in return for increased Commonwealth funding; and

(ii) improve teaching quality, literacy and numeracy; and

(2) calls on the Government to:

(a) urgently share a detailed plan for future funding of our schools, including the funding each state, system and school will receive from 2018 onwards;

(b) reverse the cut of \$30 billion from schools;

(c) explain why they tore up agreements that required states and territories to increase funding for schools as Commonwealth contributions increased, and improve teaching, literacy and numeracy; and

(d) prioritise funding for disadvantaged schools and introduce a proper students with disabilities loading, so all schools and students have the resources they need for a great education.

Ms CLAYDON (Newcastle) (18:43): It is with great pleasure that I rise today to speak on the motion brought by my colleague the member for Sydney, in relation to schools funding. Before the 2013 election those opposite promised that they would match Labor's funding model 'dollar for dollar'. Who could forget? Australian voters certainly have not. They saw the posters on election day. They heard the solemn commitment from coalition candidates. They assumed that if a Liberal-National government were elected that funding to their schools would be safe. That was an entirely reasonable assumption to make, given the solemn promises that were made.

Sadly, however, we learnt very quickly after the election that the Liberals' definition of matching was, in fact, to rip \$30 billion out of our school system and to drive a stake into the heart of Gonski's needs based funding. This means of course fewer teachers, less one-on-one attention for students in schools and, inevitably, leaving students behind. Disadvantaged students and communities will of course suffer the most. Shockingly, the Turnbull government's funding shortfall is equivalent to cutting one in seven teachers across our nation.

The schools I represent in Newcastle will lose a massive \$33 million in the next two years alone. It is particularly distressing, because we are just starting to see some of the amazing benefits that the Gonski funding is delivering to schools cross the country—I have had the pleasure of seeing firsthand the benefits of Gonski in my local schools.

Many schools have used that extra funding to provide additional teachers and to have specialised support staff deliver more individual attention to students through tailored learning programs, greater subject choice, extension classes and extra curricular activities to ensure that every child is engaged at school. Students have benefited from smaller classes, intensive literacy and numeracy classes, access to speech pathologists and more support for kids with special learning needs.

All of this of course will be put at risk as those opposite proceed with these senseless cuts. But it is actually schools in the National Party electorates that will feel the pain of these cuts most in their regional electorates, because they in fact are the greatest beneficiaries of Gonski. They have received on average almost three times the boost to education funding compared to their Liberal counterparts, and more than one and a half times the funding received in Labor electorates. Of course, this makes sense because the model directs funding to areas of greatest need and addresses significant underfunding that regional schools have struggled with for years. In fact the Deputy Prime Minister's seat of New England will be amongst the electorates hardest hit, and yet the Deputy Prime Minister has not voiced a whimper of dissent against this plan.

An opposition member: Shame!

Ms CLAYDON: Indeed it is shameful, and neither, however, has the Deputy Speaker Mark Coulton, whose electorate of Parkes is the single-greatest beneficiary of Gonski. It is shameful that the Deputy Prime Minister and his national colleagues in this place have sat back mutely and watched as their own government cuts viciously from schools in their own electorates. With their silence, they are selling out their communities and betraying the children and families they are here to represent.

Labor believes that every child in every school deserves the support they need to reach their full potential. While the Prime Minister has turned his back on needs based funding and has even suggested that the Commonwealth should pull out of funding public schools entirely, Labor understands that the best returns are achieved when we invest in schools and kids that need it most.

It is hard to overstate the importance of education—not only as a basic right but as a key economic enabler. Instead of investing in education in the next generation, the Turnbull government is plundering our schools so they can splash \$50 billion of precious public money on a tax cut for big business instead. We know that a sizeable chunk of that tax funded corporate gift will end up in the hands of foreign shareholders. We also know that a further \$7.4 billion will be gifted to the four big banks.

I suggest that this is an untenable situation. Before the last election, 31 of Australia's top economists backed in the Gonski as the biggest and best investment for our future generations. That is what this government should be doing, not paying its corporate mates instead.

Mr LAMING (Bowman) (18:48): I think there is uniform agreement that we want to fund schools as generously as possible but, ultimately, to fund a school, you have to raise the revenue. Obviously, in a post-commodity boom, it is always going to be a little harder than when the money was flowing. I guess the other great indication of passion to a school system is how much you actually fund in the four-year estimates when you are in government. Of course, as we all well know now, Julia Gillard was far more focused on pink batts and the \$3.8 billion that went in that direction and instead made all of the school funding that they now refer to into what are called the out years of years 5 and 6. We call them the never-never, when governments can effectively say anything, because they do not have to budget for those amounts. It is a very, very, subtle difference. So, the coalition did commit to Gonski for the four years that a government can. When you talk about out years, you can really put any number you like out there; it really does not matter, because that money must be found in the budget every year, and the reality is Julia Gillard never, ever found that money.

You can have all the views you want, on either side of the chamber, about how much there should be in school funding. What we know is that both sides of politics can wear that merit badge and say, 'We've raised funding for schools way above inflation and way above education inflation, and our schools are now widely recognised as the best resourced and most equitably resourced in the world, bar those in one or two countries.' It is important to keep looking at OECD comparisons. It is not that important in other areas, but in schools we have school students from other parts of the world who are going to university and one day will compete with Australians for jobs. The actual outcomes are quite important, so you do not want to get yourself cornered into a system where you are funding need, because the more you fund need the more you incentivise people to create need. The more you fund outcomes

the more you have an incentive to create outcomes. I do not mean to rewrite Labor's textbook on this one, but Labor does not actually know anything about what the difference is between a high-gain and a low-gain school.

Ms Owens interjecting—

Mr LAMING: It is quite simple—and I know the member for Parramatta is faking a laugh as loudly as she can—but in reality we need to be funding gain in schools. That seems to be fairly relevant. What we do not have at the moment is a system that identifies high-quality educational outcomes and rewards those outcomes, and a system that identifies schools that are struggling and says, 'We can help.' It is one thing to give money based on need, but if half of those schools fix the need and the other half do not, you do not just keep funding need. You have to go to those schools and say, 'What exactly is happening here?' because the additional funding into need is making no difference.

Luckily, again, we can look at Europe, northern Scandinavia and the Asian economies. In most of those examples, your socioeconomic and educational background—your family background—has very little to do with your educational outcomes. You do not need to fund need in those countries because education takes care of it. The very fact that you turn up—you have the dose effect of being exposed to school—

Ms Owens interjecting—

Mr LAMING: Can we have a mature discussion here, where I respect your point of view, without silly guffaws coming from you, Member for Parramatta? In reality, what we have is an expectation that just because you go to a poor school you should have a poor outcome, and therefore we should fund you because you have more need. In reality, I firmly believe that a school with families from high-need backgrounds can do just as well as families from high-wealth and high-human-capital backgrounds. It can be done, and, in fact, Australia has the largest disparity in educational outcomes related to socioeconomic and educational backgrounds of any country in the world. What it means is that our poor kids are doing very poorly and our wealthy kids are doing very, very well in the state system—I am not talking about two-tier educational systems.

We have all that data from the OECD, and we collect information through TIMSS, PIRLS and a range of other datasets that obviously have not been looked at over here. But in reality we know that we are sitting stagnant—and in some cases slipping—with science and maths, and I am not just talking about PISA. We have a very, very significant problem, and at the same time we have—from none other than the OECD—reports that say additional funding only works in low-funded educational systems. Once you get the systems funded as well as they are in Australia, the Asian economies and northern Europe, the changes in funding do not make much difference. It simply does not make much difference.

We are a nation that can recognise quality and disseminate it. At another time we will go into the significant obstructions that we have in state education systems that do not report on outcomes satisfactorily, do not report on disparities within schools and certainly do not want to put their school leadership under any sort of scrutiny on outcomes. We will slowly get there. I confess that neither side of politics is fully over the hurdle on that one yet, but one day we will recognise quality in our teachers and in our principals. We will reward that and you will see struggling schools increase in their outcomes for the first time.

Ms STANLEY (Werriwa) (18:53): I rise to speak in support of this motion, knowing well the huge difference that needs based funding is making in my area, despite this government's dangerously ham-fisted approach to its implementation, which has included a \$30 billion cut. This is despite an election promise to match Labor dollar for dollar. Even with this government's lack of commitment to the Gonski reforms, the funding that has been made available so far is definitely making a real difference. Many schools in Werriwa work with an above average number of disadvantaged children. They have all benefited from the introduction of needs based funding, which has extended the support that they are able to provide to those most in need. This funding has meant that the schools are able to employ extra teachers, teachers' aides, administrative staff and speech pathologists to implement new programs to give students opportunities they did not have before.

At a recent visit to James Busby High School, the member for Sydney and I were able to see firsthand how the funding made available through these reforms is making a difference in the children's lives. The school has employed additional teachers and support staff, enabling students to work in smaller groups with more one-on-one support for those students most in need and bolstering their capacity to improve their literacy and numeracy. The lessons include giving practical advice on why it is important to keep receipts and how to read the receipts and ensure their change is correct. Each of the students has been affected by factors far beyond their control, situations they are often born into. Needs-based funding has opened up for these students opportunities that they would not have previously had, enabling them to improve their literacy and numeracy, where they would have struggled without these funds. The principal at James Busby High School, Olimpia Bartolillo, is a passionate advocate. She is so committed to her students that she has worked at the school for her entire teaching career. Her passion and dedication and the dedication of her team have been clear in the conversations that I have had when visiting the school and have been noted by other community members more broadly.

Lurnea High School is a great example of the benefits that needs-based funding is bringing to my community. 82 per cent of families attending the school are in the lowest quartile of the Family Occupation and Education Index. It already has a long tradition of providing greater opportunities to less advantaged communities in Western Sydney. I know this first hand through the years my sister and I attended there, and more recently my three sons. Keeping with that tradition, Lurnea High has used funding enabled through the Gonski reforms to implement a range of new programs and better resourcing existing ones, which has ensured all students a far wider range of opportunities and that those in need of more focussed assistance have access to it.

I was fortunate enough to return there last week for presentations by the new year 7 cohort. These presentations are the product of a program called the 'Year 7 Transition Innovation', which is to have year 7s start their high school education by completing and presenting a group project. The program is significantly focused on building problem-based learning skills while also encouraging creativity and innovation. The project was to improve the local park, with students asked to create a new space where the community can come and be together. The best groups were chosen to present to an audience that included their parents, Liverpool Councillor Nathan Hagarty, Liverpool Council Social Planner James Flynn and myself. The standard was extremely high and we were all impressed by the creativity on display. In Mr

Flynn's words, the ideas and the level of detailed work displayed in the presentations were 'just wow'. The group presentations included many aspects promoting learning, teamwork, critical thinking, practical art and hands-on craft skills, as well as encouraging them to make new friends in a fun environment and fostering a greater sense of community amongst the new cohort.

The implementation of this program has been contingent on the availability of funding through the Gonski reforms. Programs like this are making a real difference at Lurnea and building a greater sense of pride and community amongst students, with a 51 per cent reduction in truancy and a 43 per cent reduction in absenteeism. The impact that this funding is already having is clearly visible. If we follow through on the plan we not only improve academic outcomes as the funding is doing at James Busby we also strengthen our communities through a broader range skills, such as what we see at Lurnea High School. My community wants to see more of this. The government needs to end the uncertainty over this funding and reverse these cuts so that no-one is denied the right of a decent education.

Mr EVANS (Brisbane) (18:59): I am very pleased to rise and speak on this topic of school funding, especially in light of some of the comments we are consistently hearing from the opposition in this debate. Those who care about the quality and the standard of debate in Australia, those who have ever wished that politicians might be restricted from saying blatantly untrue things and those who have an interest in sound policy should be listening very, very carefully to the words that the opposition are using with respect to school funding and they ought to be alarmed.

Listening to Labor's lies, one might conclude that the government was actually delivering less school funding than Labor did. It is a fact that this government is delivering record levels of federal government money towards schools. We are delivering more this year than last year, more than any year before and certainly more than Labor provided. And anyone who is inclined to believe the Labor lies should just ask a Labor politician to show them an actual graph of the funding delivered over recent years and they will see very plainly what I am about to say.

The budget papers show very clearly how the federal government's support of schools is growing each and every year. The federal government's contribution to running schools is \$16.1 billion this financial year, rising to \$20.2 billion in 2020—an increase of over 26 per cent. Now, that is for all school funding as a whole. But let's dive into what I think is the most relevant component of the funding, because I think what matters most sometimes in this debate is how the funding is delivered to government schools.

In my state of Queensland the federal government is helping the state to run state schools to the tune of \$1.37 billion in this financial year, rising to \$1.79 billion in 2020—an increase of about 33 per cent. And anyone who cares about school funding can go and confirm what I have just said for themselves. These numbers are in the budget papers—people can go straight to the source and checked this out for themselves. The budget is available online—Budget Paper No. 1, statement 5, page 5-49. It shows the government spending, expenses by area under education and under schools. It is all there in black and white. They can see straight away that the funding numbers are going up, not down. They are going up by an amount that is higher than the rate of inflation and population growth combined. It is increasing per student per year in real terms.

Labor's next lie which needs to be called out is that they are trying to say that they would have spent more. They want us to believe that if they promise to spend more then somehow that equates to cuts on our side, even though our funding level is going up and up. The former speaker, my colleague the member for Bowman, already spoke about Labor making promises in the out years, when they do not have to make their promises add up in the budgetary sense. I guess it is a case of 'promises, promises'. Labor promised this extra funding at exactly the same time as they promised our country three economic surpluses, which obviously never happened either.

On the topic of accuracy, I want to say one thing about the name 'Gonski'. On state school fences around Brisbane there are green signs saying that Gonski is making a difference in those schools. In fact, Gonski is not making a difference in those schools, in the sense that Gonski has never actually existed in the state of Queensland. No Gonski agreement was ever made in Queensland, or in most states around Australia for that matter. The kindest interpretation we could use is that the funding agreement with the Queensland government is Gonski inspired. But it is not Gonski funding, and if a local business made a claim like that it would be unlawful under Consumer Law.

For parents, teachers and students who do not know, those signs were printed up by the Queensland Teachers Union, not by the schools. My understanding is that the teachers union offers to host a free barbecue or similar for the teachers at the local school—and who does not want a free barbecue? I fully understand that. But one of the conditions of having that barbecue is that these signs talking about Gonski funding go up in the school when in fact, of course, technically that does not exist.

There is an interesting article in *The Sydney Morning Herald* today by Ross Gittins. It makes the point that the Gonski report was not really ever about additional funding being a key to improving education. It was about balancing funding at whatever level it was provided on the basis of measured need.

On the topic of school funding Labor are misleading the public. I am calling them out on it today. Anyone who really cares about school funding should support this government for as long as it continues to deliver record funding to local schools and should think twice about a political party like Labor that would seek to mislead and scare, and to drag sound policy into their murky politics.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hastie): I thank the honourable member for his forensic examination of the issue!

Ms Owens: Mr Deputy Speaker, thank you for your impartial analysis of that rather one-sided speech!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: And I call the honourable member for Parramatta.

Ms OWENS (Parramatta) (19:03): It is a very easy thing to take part of a story and turn something that is actually true in part into something that is untrue. That is just what we have heard from the previous speaker.

Let me talk about Gonski. Gonski was a long time in coming. It was years, actually, of negotiation between stakeholders all around the country in all the different school systems that finally came together and came to a common understanding about what our schools needed if we were going to position Australia and our children in the best possible way for the

future. And it was not a four-year funding strategy; it was actually a strategy over six and beyond years. The funding increased year by year, and the major increases were in the fifth and sixth years, because you actually had to train teachers for it.

I know the government is not saying you cannot talk about the outliers—unless it is a tax cut. If it is tax cut for big business, you can talk 10 years quite happily, but apparently not when it comes to school funding—even though this plan was put in place and in the budget, and the opposition, on the day before the election, committed absolutely to funding it in full. So we can have two truths here. The government is funding the first four years, increasing year by year, and therefore they are funding more and more each year. That is true. But it is also true that they committed to funding years 5 and 6 yet they are not funding them. Both things are true. Yes, the funding is going up. It was supposed to—that is what Gonski did. Congratulations for supporting the first four years of Gonski, but no congratulations whatsoever for telling untruths to the Australian people that you were going to fund years 5 and 6 and now you are not. See, it is actually quite simple. You do not get to take part of a story and turn it into a giant untruth. You just do not get to do it and you do not get to carry on about out-years yet you are going to fund 10 years of a tax cut. With tax cuts outlying years are fine but with education they are not—how about some consistency or some truth from this government about something as important as education?

I want to talk about what my great schools are doing with the extra funding they have received through the needs-based incentives which this government is not committed to. I have a school in my electorate called Merrylands High School. It is a fantastic school in an incredibly disadvantaged area. They received some additional needs-based funding. With that funding and targeted literacy and numeracy programs and one-to-one support for students in the upper years, school attendance is up by 5.1 per cent and there has been a 14 per cent increase in the submission of class work but, more importantly, there are more people getting into university now. The number of students receiving university offers in the three years thanks to this program has increased dramatically—in fact, it has doubled. That is a remarkable effect from a relatively small investment through Gonski. That is the sort of program that this government does not support.

I have a wonderful little primary school in the south of my electorate called Holy Family Primary School. It is an incredibly diverse community. They have incredible numbers, with nearly half their students turning up in kindergarten—or preschool as it is called here; wrong state—unable to read at all. They have no reading capacity at all and some of them have incredibly low verbal skills. That is another school which is receiving special needs-based funding to work one-on-one with these children, to develop plans one-on-one, to make sure that these children are school ready and can do the best they can. It is incredibly important funding.

One of the speakers on the other side was ranting about high-gain schools and how you should only fund high-gain schools. Let me tell you: the schools that are high-gain schools are high-gain schools because they were funded. The high-gain schools in Western Sydney—Cabramatta High, Liverpool Public, Girraween Public, Burwood Girls High and Parramatta West Public in my electorate—are in some of the most ethnically diverse communities in the country. They have all received additional funding between \$670,000 for the lowest and \$2.2 million for the highest and they are all high-gain schools because of the additional funding.

This nonsense that we heard over here that you only fund schools after they are high gain—excuse me? That is why I was laughing, Deputy Speaker—because that is one of the silliest things I have ever heard. These schools received extra funding, the kind of funding that you guys are going to cut even though you said you would not. Even though you stood up and said you would not, you are cutting it and you are going to do serious damage to my schools and my community by doing it.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hastie): I thank the honourable member for her equally impassioned address.

An honourable member: Hear, hear! Forensic!

The DEPUTY SPEAKER: Forensic, sure! I call the member for Hughes.

Mr CRAIG KELLY (Hughes) (19:09): Thank you, Deputy Speaker, and I look forward to giving a forensic rebuttal of the contribution by the member for Parramatta! Firstly, I must admit it is very disappointing in this parliament to see time and time again Labor members coming in and talking about a cut to education funding. They think that if they can repeat this untruth enough, if they are all trained about it in their speaking notes and if they stand up and go, 'There's this \$30 billion cut to school funding,' the public will believe them. But the public is starting to wake up.

We have heard this over and over again. We have heard it with their 'Mediscare' campaign—complete and utter falsehoods. We heard it last week when they rolled out a young gentleman who turned out to be a Labor Party member. They put him up in front of the microphone and he talked about how he was going to have his penalty rates cut. It was going to cost him \$100 a day. It turned out that he was a Labor Party member, was working for Coles and had not had a cent cut from penalty rates. Time and time again what we are hearing from the Labor Party is this practice of blatant untruths. It treats our political system poorly and treats all of us, as members of parliament, poorly.

The facts are very clear: there are no cuts, not a single cut. In fact, from 2014—the first time the coalition got to spend money on education—to 2017 there have been no cuts. We are actually spending 38 per cent more in 2017 than the Labor Gillard government did. How can anyone come in and say: 'It's a cut. It's a big cut'? It is 38 per cent more.

An opposition member interjecting—

Mr CRAIG KELLY: I will take that interjection, because this is the deception that the Labor Party were involved in with education funding. The member for Parramatta said, 'All the spending was in years 5 and 6.' Do you know why, Mr Deputy Speaker? Because when you put the spending in years 5 and 6 you do not have to show where the money comes from. It was a complete and utter con job. They had all the spending backloaded because they did not have a clue where they were getting the money from.

If members of the Labor Party want to come into this parliament and say, 'We want to spend, on top of the 38 per cent the coalition has put in, \$30 billion more,' they have to say where the money is coming from. What taxes are they going to increase to fund that \$30 billion? If they are not going to increase taxes, what areas of expenditure are they going to cut? We hear this hypocrisy all the time.

The member of the Labor Party who spoke first in the debate tonight talked about betraying our children. What betrays our children are governments that get in, borrow money and spend

it just for their own popularity. It is our children who we burden with paying back the interest and eventually paying back the money. Already, on the debt and reckless, politically motivated spending of the previous Labor government, which we saw over six years—and I know the member at the table was not here and was not involved, so we cannot blame him, but many members who were are here—we now have to find \$1 billion every single month just to pay the interest bill. That continues to increase, and they want us to go and borrow another \$30 billion. If those opposite really want an extra \$30 billion in education, they should say where the money is coming in. Do not come into the parliament and mislead people that there is some \$30 billion cut when the facts are that we are actually spending 38 per cent more.

The member for Parramatta asked why what she called 'the business tax cuts' are spread over 10 years. This shows the poor understanding of Labor members, how they simply fail to understand business and economics. The reason that those tax cuts are spread out over time is so businesses can plan their investment today, spend the money in the years to come, and know that by the time their investment turns a profit they will be paying a lower tax rate. If we are going to make our country richer and grow the economy, we need to get an internationally competitive tax rate. Ken Henry—not a friend of the coalition, a friend of the Labor Party—said last week that even the modest plan we have to get our corporate tax rate down to 25 per cent is not enough. When Ken Henry says that, it is about time the Labor Party listened, because we have to get this economy moving. If they want to get more money put into education, it is all about getting the economy moving and getting more growth.

The DEPUTY SPEAKER (Mr Hastie): The time allotted for this debate has expired. The debate is adjourned and the resumption of the debate will be made an order of the day for the next sitting.

Federation Chamber adjourned at 19:15

QUESTIONS IN WRITING
Cradle Mountain Master Plan
(Question No. 48)

Ms Keay asked the Minister for Trade, Tourism and Investment on 7 November 2016 :

In respect of the Government's election commitment to provide \$1 million to the Cradle Coast Authority (CCA) in Tasmania to progress the Cradle Mountain Master Plan to an investment-ready stage, will this be honoured; if not, why not; if so, (a) can he provide details of discussions between the Government and the CAA, and (b) when will the funding be delivered.

Mr Ciobo: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

Yes.

- (a) Discussions with funding recipients will be commercial in confidence.
- (b) In accordance with the Government's election commitment.

Illicit Drugs
(Question No. 51)

Ms Keay asked the Minister for Health and Aged Care and Minister for Sport, in writing, on 07 November 2016:

In respect of the Government's election commitment to fund \$5.69 million as part of the Government's 'plan to combat the scourge of ice in our communities', will this be honoured; if not, why not; if so, (a) when and how will the funding be delivered, (b) will the funding be available for preventative measures, if so, what proportion (as a percentage) will be dedicated to prevention (versus rehabilitation), (c) will any of this funding be allocated to (i) compliance, regulation or policing, and (ii) identified 'ice' hot spots, and (d) what sum will be allocated to Circular Head in North West Tasmania.

Mr Hunt: The answer to the honourable member's question is as follows:

The Government is honouring its commitment to fund \$5.69 million to the Tasmanian PHN.

- (a) The Funding Agreement between the Department and the Tasmanian PHN, for

\$5.69 million from 2016-17 to 2018-19, under the PHN Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program was executed on 29 April 2016. This funding forms part of the \$298.2 million Australian Government response to the National Ice Taskforce's Final Report.

(b) Funding to PHNs under the PHN Drug and Alcohol Treatment Program is to commission additional drug and alcohol treatment services. PHNs can also use the funding to support the drug and alcohol workforce to support a sustainable drug and alcohol system into the future. Activities involving prevention are not in-scope for the funding and therefore cannot be commissioned by the Tasmanian PHN.

- c) (i) No. See response to Section (b).

(ii) The Tasmanian PHN will commission services based on gaps and priorities identified in its regional Needs Assessment and within the parameters of the funding guidelines set by the Department.

(d) The Tasmanian PHN is progressing commissioning processes and will enter into contracts with drug and alcohol treatment service providers based on the needs and priorities identified in their Needs Assessment.

Venue Hire by the Minister
(Question No. 60)

Mr Keogh asked the Minister for Foreign Affairs on 7 November 2016:

In respect of the \$444,889.15 contract to Burswood Property Trust (CN3382013) for the provision of hotels and lodging and meeting facilities –

- (a) for what purpose was the venue hired;
- (b) how many staff members attended the function for which the venue was hired;
- (c) what was the Australian Public Service classification level of each staff member in attendance;
- (d) what was the period of use of the venue; and
- (e) what is the itemised breakdown of costs associated with the contract.

Ms Julie Bishop: The answer to the member's question is as follows:

a) The venue will be hired to provide conference facilities for up to 500 delegates of the 54 participant countries to attend an intercessional meeting of the Kimberley Process Certification Scheme. The Kimberley Process Certification Scheme is a process, established by the United Nations General Assembly to prevent "conflict diamonds" from entering the mainstream rough diamond market. 2017 marks the first time Australia has chaired the Kimberley Process Certification scheme and hosted the required meetings under the chairmanship.

b) DFAT is in the process of planning how many staff members will be required for the event.

c) DFAT is in the process of determining the classification level of each staff member that will be required for the event.

d) The venue will be used over the period 30 April to 4 May 2017.

e) Itemised costs associated with the contract including GST are as follows:

- Event costs, including venue hire and catering \$231,900
- Audio visual costs \$92,539.15
- Interpretation costs \$120,450.

National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children (Question No. 578)

Ms Butler asked the Minister representing the Attorney-General, in writing, on 9 November 2016:

In respect of the Government's announcement on 28 October that it would commit \$18.5 million, for the period of the Third Action Plan for the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children, for integrated duty lawyer and social support services in family courts, (a) will each registry serving the Family Court and/or Federal Circuit Court be provided with such services, (b) who will (i) employ, and (ii) provide administrative support, the people providing such services, (c) how will the Government be assured of the quality of such services, and (d) what qualifications and experience will be required of the persons providing social support services.

Mr Keenan: The Attorney-General has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

(a) The Government is currently negotiating arrangements for these services with the states and territories, including service locations.

(b) The services will be managed by the legal aid commission in each jurisdiction.

(c) Appropriate accountability and reporting measures will be built into the funding arrangement negotiated with states and territories. The Attorney-General's Department will also evaluate the services.

(d) Legal aid commissions will be requested and encouraged to partner with existing family violence support services to deliver the integrated, court-based services. The qualifications and experience of staff will be a matter for legal aid commissions to consider in managing the new services.

National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children

(Question No. 579)

Ms Butler asked the Minister representing the Attorney-General, in writing, on 9 November 2016:

In respect of the Government's announcement on 28 October that it would commit \$5 million, for one year, to extend the 'pilots' announced under the Women's Safety Package, why have these pilots not been extended for the full period of the Third Action Plan for the National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children?

Mr Keenan: The Attorney-General has provided the following answer to the honourable member's question:

The legal assistance pilots are funded under the Women's Safety Package until 30 June 2018. The additional year of funding announced on 28 October 2016 will extend the pilots until 30 June 2019, to align with the full period of the Third Action Plan 2016-19 of the *National Plan to Reduce Violence against Women and their Children 2010-2022*.